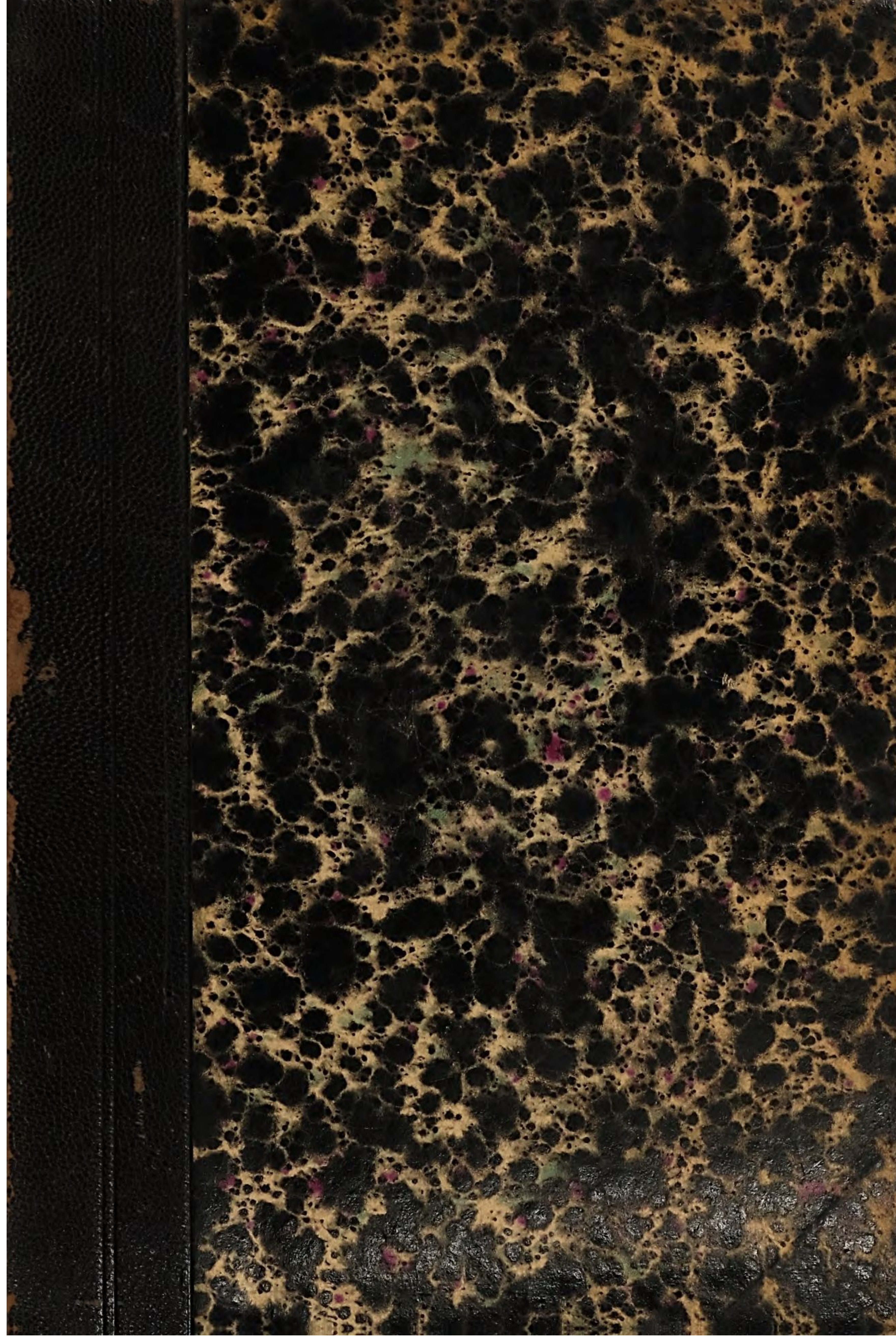




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IN ONE VOLUME.

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PENSHURST CASTLE

IN THE TIME OF
SIR PHILIP SIDNEY

BY

EMMA MARSHALL,

AUTHOR OF

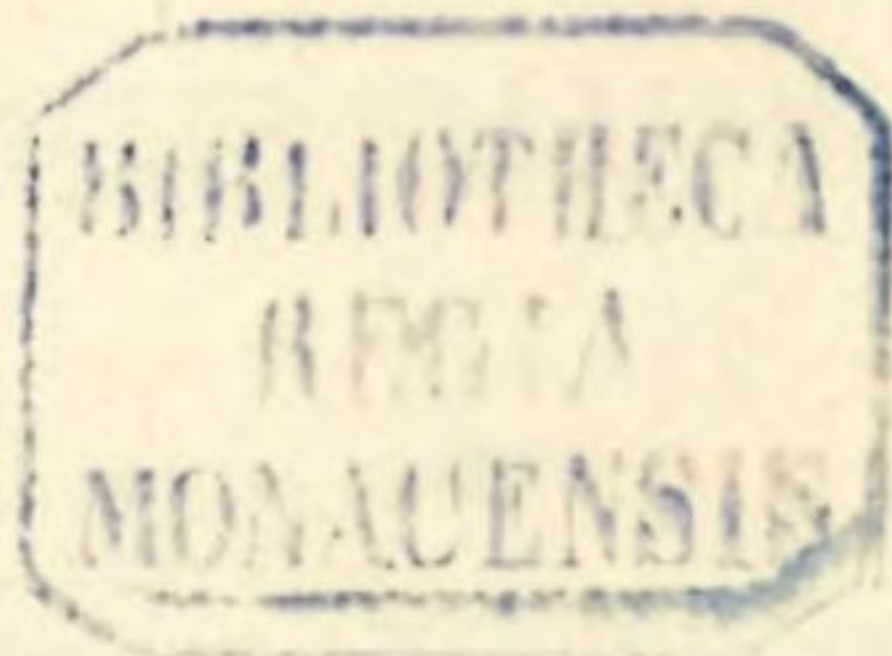
“UNDER SALISBURY SPIRE,” “WINCHESTER MEADS,” ETC.

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LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1894.



“A right man-like man, such as Nature, often erring, yet shows sometimes she fain would make.”—*Sir Philip Sidney*.

PREFACE.

FOR the incidents in the life of Sir Philip Sidney, who is the central figure in this story of "the spacious times of great Elizabeth," I am indebted to Mr. H. R. Fox Bourne's interesting and exhaustive Memoir of this noble knight and Christian gentleman.

In his short life of thirty-one years are crowded achievements as scholar, poet, statesman and soldier, which find perhaps few, if indeed any equal, in the records of history; a few only of these chosen from among many appear in the following pages. The characters of Mary Gifford and her sister, and the two brothers, Humphrey and George Ratcliffe, are wholly imaginary.

The books which have been consulted for the poetry of Sir Philip Sidney and the times in which he lived are—Vol. I. of *An English Garner*; M. Jusserand's

Roman du Temps de Shakespere, and a very interesting essay on Sir Philip Sidney and his works, published in Cambridge in 1858.

WOODSIDE, LEIGH WOODS,
CLIFTON.

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BOOK I.

“What man is he that boasts of fleshly might,
And vaine assurance of mortality;
Which, all so soone as it doth come to fight
Against spirituall foes, yields by and by:
Or from the field most cowardly doth fly?
No, let the man ascribe it to his skill,
That thorough grace hath gained victory.
If any strength we have, it is to ill;
But all the good is God’s, both power and will.”
The Faery Queene, Book I. Canto 10.

PENSHURST CASTLE.

CHAPTER I.

THE SISTERS.

“She was right faire and fresh as morning rose,
But somewhat sad and solemne eke in sight,
As if some pensive thought constrained her gentle spright.”
SPENSER.

1581.—“There is time yet ere sunset; let me, I pray you, go down to the lych gate with the wheaten cake for Goody Salter.”

“Nay, Lucy; methinks there are reasons for your desire to go down to the village weightier than the wheaten cake you would fain carry with you. Rest quietly at home; it may be Humphrey will be coming to let us know if Mr. Sidney has arrived at Penshurst. Why such haste, little sister?”

“Because I do covet a place where I can witness the grand tourney at Whitehall. It may suit your mood, Mary, to live always on this hilltop, with naught to see and naught to do; with no company but a cross-grained stepmother, and the cows and sheep. I am

sick of it. Even a run down to the village is a change. Yes, I am going; one hour, and I will be back."

Mary Gifford laid a detaining hand on her young sister's shoulder.

"Have a care, dear child, nor let your wild fancies run away with your discretion. Am I not one who has a right to caution you? I who have come back as a widow to my old home, bereft and lonely."

"Because you married a bad man, and rued the day, it is no reason that I should do the same. Trust me, good sister. I may be young, but I have my wits about me, and no soft speeches catch me in a net."

The elder sister's beautiful face, always grave and mournful in its earnestness, grew even more mournful than was its wont, as she looked down into her sister's lovely eyes, and kissed her forehead.

"Child, I pray God to keep you safe; but the net you speak of is not spread in the sight of any bird, and it is captured all unawares."

Lucy's answer was to return her sister's kiss with a quick, warm embrace, and then she was off, with the basket on her arm, and her glad, young voice ringing out,—

"Good-bye! good-bye! I'll be back in an hour."

Mary Gifford stood under the old stone porch, watching the light figure as it tripped away, and then was turning into the house again, when a sharp voice she knew too well called,—

"Lucy! Lucy! Where's that hussy? There's two pails of milk to set for cream in the pans, and the cakes are scorching before the fire. Lucy! Where's Lucy?"

Mary Gifford did not reply to the question, but said,—

“I will go to the dairy, mother, and see to the milk.”

“And take your boy with ye, I’ll warrant, who will be up to mischief. No, no; it’s Lucy’s work, and she shall do it. It will be bedtime before we know it, for the sun is going down. Lucy!”

This time a child’s voice was heard, as little feet pattered along the terrace outside Ford Manor.

“Aunt Lou is gone,” the child said. “I saw her running down the hill.”

“Is she? She shall repent it, then, gadding off like that. More shame to you,” Mrs. Forrester said wrathfully, “to let her go, Mary, and cheat me by not telling me the truth. You want the child to go to ruin as you did yourself, I suppose.”

Mary Gifford’s face flushed crimson, as she said,—

“It ill becomes my father’s wife to taunt his daughter, when he is not here to defend her. Come with me, Ambrose, nor stay to listen to more hard words.”

But the child doubled his small fists, and said, approaching his grandmother,—

“I’ll beat you. I’ll kill you if you make mother cry! I will, you—”

“Hush, my little son,” Mary said, drawing the boy away. “It is near thy bedtime. Come with me; nor forget thy manners if other folk are not mindful of theirs.”

The tears of mingled sorrow and anger were coursing each other down Mary Gifford’s face, but she wiped them hastily away, and, putting her arm round the child, she led him up the narrow stairs leading from

the large kitchen to the room above, where she sat down, with Ambrose clasped close to her heart, by the square bay window, which was flung open on this lovely April evening.

Ford Manor stood on the slope of the hill, commanding a view of the meadows stretching down to the valley, where the home of the Sidneys and the tower of the old church could be seen amongst the trees, now golden in the brilliant western sunshine of the spring evening. Perhaps there can scarcely be found a more enchanting prospect than that on which Mary Gifford looked, as she sat with her boy clasped in her arms, her heart, which had been pierced with many sorrows, still smarting with the sharp thrust her stepmother had given her.

That young sister whom she loved so passionately, about whom, in her gay thoughtless youth, she was so anxious, whom she was ever longing to see safe under the shelter of a good man's love—it was hard that her boy should hear such words from those pitiless lips—"lead her to ruin!"—when her one desire was to shield her from all contamination of the evil world, of which she had herself had such bitter experience.

Little Ambrose was tired, after a day of incessant running hither and thither, and lay quiet with his head on his mother's breast, in that blissful state of contentment to find himself there, which gives the thrill of deepest joy to a mother's heart.

Ambrose was six years old, and a fair and even beautiful child. The stiff, ugly dress of the time, could not quite hide the symmetry of his rounded limbs, and the large ruff, now much crumpled after the day's wear, set off to advantage the round chin which rested on it

and the rosy lips, which had just parted with a smile, as Mary said,—

“Is my boy sleepy?”

“No, mother; don’t put me a-bed yet.”

Mary was not unwilling to comply with the request, and so they sat on, the boy’s red-gold curls making a gleam of brightness on the sombre black garments of widowhood which Mary still wore.

Presently the boy said,—

“When I’m a man, will Mr. Philip Sidney let me be his esquire? Aunt Lou says p’raps he will, if you ask him.”

“My boy will not be a man for many a year yet,” Mary said, pressing the child closer. “And he would not leave his mother even for Mr. Philip Sidney.”

Ambrose sat upright, and said,—

“I would come back to you, as Humphrey Ratcliffe comes back to his mother, but I’d like to ride off with Mr. Sidney when I am a man.”

“Yes, yes, my boy, all in good time.”

“And I must learn to ride and wrestle, and—oh! a hundred things. I wish to be a man like Mr. Philip Sidney.”

“May you ever be as good, noble, and learned, my son; but come, the sun is gone to bed, and Ambrose must go too.”

Then, with loving hands, she prepared her child for his bed, smoothing back the shining hair from the pure white brow, where the blue veins were clearly traced, and Ambrose knelt at her knee and repeated his little prayer, adding, with childlike simplicity, after the Amen,—

"Pray, God, make me a good man, like Mr. Philip Sidney."

While Mary Gifford and little Ambrose were thus together in the upper chamber of Ford Manor, Lucy Forrester had reached the old timbered house by the lych gate of Penshurst Church, and had obtained admission at Goody Salter's door, and put the wheaten cake and two eggs on the little rickety table which stood against the wall in the dark, low room. The old woman's thanks were not very profuse, hers was by no means a grateful disposition, and, perhaps, there was no great inducement for Lucy to prolong her visit. However that might be, it was very short, and she was soon outside again, and standing in the village street, looking right and left, as if expecting to see someone coming in either direction. It had not escaped Mary Gifford's notice that Lucy dressed herself with more than ordinary care. She wore the short skirt of the time, which displayed her small feet and ankles to advantage.

Over the skirt was a crimson kirtle of fine cloth, cut square in the bodice, and crossed by a thick white kerchief, edged with lace. Lucy's slender neck was set in a ruff, fastened at the throat by a gold brooch, which sparkled in the light.

Her chestnut hair was gathered up from her forehead, and a little pointed cap of black velvet, edged with gold, was set upon it, and contrasted well with the bright locks, from which a curl, either by accident or design, had been loosened, and rippled over her shoulder, below her waist.

Lucy was well known in the village, and, as she

stood debating whether she should go home or wait for a few minutes longer, a man, with the badge of the Sidneys on his arm, came up on horseback, and turned into the park gate, which was near this end of the village.

"They must be coming now," she said; "they must be coming. Perhaps I shall see Humphrey, and he will tell me if Mr. Sydney is returning this evening. I can hide behind the trees just outside the gate. No one will see me."

Presently another horseman came riding slowly along. He was hailed by one of the loiterers in the street, and Lucy heard the question asked and answered.

"Yes, Mr. Sydney is on the road. He is gone round by the main entrance, with two of his gentlemen."

"He won't pass this way, then, to-night," Lucy thought. "Oh, I wish I could see him. Humphrey is so dull, and he won't ask him to do what I want. I know my Lady Mary would take me to see the show if Mr. Philip wished, and—"

"Lucy, why are you here alone?" and the speaker dismounted, and, throwing the reins of his horse to a groom, he was at her side in a moment.

"I came down to bring food to the hungry. Where's the harm of that?"

"It is getting late. I'll walk up the hill with you. Lucy, does Mistress Gifford know of your coming?"

"What if she doesn't? I please myself; tell me, Humphrey, is Mr. Sydney come home?"

"For a few days. He returns shortly for the great tournament at Whitehall in honour of the French Embassy."

"On Sunday next. Oh, Humphrey, I do want to see it—to see Mr. Sidney tilt. I would walk to London to see it, if I can't ride. There is so little time left. Why won't you ask—beg—pray someone to take me?"

"The tournament is put off. There is time enough and to spare. Her Majesty the Queen has desired delay, and a day in May is now fixed. Three weeks hence—"

"Three weeks hence! Then there is hope. I shall go to Lady Mary myself, if I don't see Mr. Sidney."

"Well, well, come home now, or Mistress Gifford will be full of fears about you. I marvel that you should add a drop of bitterness to her full cup."

"I hate you to talk like that," Lucy said. "I love Mary better than all the world beside. No one loves her as I do."

Humphrey Ratcliffe sighed.

"You speak rashly, like the wayward child you are. In sober earnest, Lucy, you are too fair to wander into the village alone, and you know it."

"I wanted to go into the park, and then you came and stopped me."

"If I did, so much the better," was the reply. "I will see you over the river, at least. Then I must return, to find out if Mr. Sidney has any commands for the morrow."

They had reached the River Medway now—in these days scarcely more than a shallow stream, crossed by stepping-stones, or by a narrow plank, with a hand-rail on one side only. When the river was low, it was easy to cross the ford, but, when swollen by heavy

rains, it required some skill to do so, and many people preferred to use the plank as a means of crossing the stream.

Just as Lucy had put her foot on the first stepping-stone, and rejected all Humphrey's offers of help with a merry laugh, they were joined by Humphrey's brother, who was coming down the hill in the opposite direction.

"Stop! hold, Mistress Lucy!" he cried. "Mistress Forrester, hold!"

"What for?" she said. "I am coming over," and with extraordinary swiftness, Lucy sprang from stone to stone, and, reaching the opposite bank, curtsied to George Ratcliffe, saying,—

"Your pleasure, sir?"

"My pleasure is that you should not put your limbs in peril by scaling those slippery stones. Why not take the bridge?"

"Because I like the ford better. Good-bye. Good-bye, Humphrey," she called, waving her hand to the other brother who stood on the bank.

"Good-bye, Mistress Lucy, George will take care of you now. And make all haste homewards."

Lucy now began to race up the steep hill at full speed, and her faithful squire had much difficulty to keep up with her light, airy footsteps.

He was a giant in height and build, and was breathless, when, at the turn on the side of the hill leading to Ford Manor, Lucy paused.

"You have no cause to come a step further," she said, laughing. "Why, Master Ratcliffe, you are puffing like old Meg when she has pulled the cart up the hill! Good even to you."

"Stop, Mistress Forrester."

"Well, now you are more respectful, I will stop. Well, pray thee, take breath, and make short work of what you are going to say."

George hesitated, as much from shyness as from want of breath.

"My mother bids me say that she would fain have you sup with her on the morrow. Say yes, Lucy; say yes."

"Oh! I must ask permission first," she said, "for, you know, I am a dutiful step-daughter; but commend me to your mother, and say I will come if they will permit me, for I love Madam Ratcliffe's sweet pasties. We do not get sweet pasties yonder. We are bidden to think all sweet and pleasant things unwholesome, and so we ought to believe it is true; but I don't, for one. Good-night."

And Lucy was away along the rugged path at the side of the lane, with its deep ruts and loose stones, before George Ratcliffe could say another word.

He pursued his way for another mile up the hill, till he came to a house of rather more pretension than Ford Manor, but of the same character, with a heavy stone portico and square bays on either side. The diamond-shaped panes of the lattice were filled in with thick glass, which had only, within the last few years, replaced the horn which had admitted but little light into the room, and had been the first attempt at filling in the windows to keep out rain and storm. Until the latter years of Henry the Eighth's reign wooden shutters were universal even in the homes of the rich and great.

The Ratcliffes had held their land under the lords of Penshurst for more than two centuries, and had, as in duty bound, supplied men and arms, when called upon to do so by their chief.

The Forresters held also the same tenure of the pasture lands and meadows which sloped down from Ford Manor, and, in earlier times, they had been the keepers of the woods which clothed the undulating ground about Penshurst, and the stately beeches and chestnut trees which stand almost unrivalled in the far stretching park, where the grand old house of the Sidneys is situated.

But Mr. Forrester, the father of Mary Gifford and Lucy, was the last of his race, and, though his widow and daughter still occupied the Manor Farm, the office of keeper of the woods had fallen to another family on a more distant part of the estate, and it was only by courtesy that Mrs. Forrester was permitted to remain in the house for her life.

The Ratcliffes occupied a superior position, and Mrs. Ratcliffe prided herself on her family, and considered Mrs. Forrester very much beneath her in the social scale.

Was not her younger son the favourite squire of Mr. Philip Sidney, an honour coveted by many, and had he not acquired the air and bearing of the gentlemen about the Court of the Maiden Queen, and was he not, moreover, educated in book learning as befitted his position. George, if more homely in his person and manner, was known in the whole district as a man of honour, and celebrated for his breed of horses, and for the excellence of his farm produce.

He superintended everything connected with the small estate, and supplied the neighbouring gentry with horses, when, perhaps for some hastily formed expedition, they were suddenly required.

Both brothers were respected in the neighbourhood, and Mrs. Ratcliffe had indeed cause to be satisfied with the sons who had so well taken up the place their father had left vacant, by a sudden death in the prime of his manhood.

George Ratcliffe found his mother seated at the head of the long table, where the men and maidens employed on the farm were gathered at the lower end.

All rose when George entered, and he said, addressing his mother, as he seated himself near her,—

“I am later than I thought. I crave pardon, good mother.”

“Granted, my son,” was the reply, with an inclination of the head, which was, to say the least of it, very stately.

Mrs. Ratcliffe stood always upon her dignity before her household, and never forgot herself, or allowed others to forget, that she was the daughter of a Knight of the Shire, and that her own family was connected with some of the leading people at Court. Distantly connected, but still the fact remained, and Mrs. Ratcliffe made the most of it.

When the horn-handled knife had been struck thrice on the board by the bailiff, who sat at the lower end, the large party rose. George rose also, and said a short grace. Then the hall was deserted, the servants waiting till Madam retired to her room, before they cleared away the dishes.

George made a hasty meal, and then, giving his

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hand to his mother, he led her through a door at the upper end of the hall to her own parlour.

The spring twilight was deepening, and the figures of both mother and son were but dimly visible.

Perhaps George was not sorry that there was but little light for his mother to discover the blush which rose to his honest face, as he said,—

“I saw Mistress Lucy Forrester an hour ago, and I bid her to sup with us on the morrow. I gained your consent to do so,” he added hurriedly.

“You told me of your purpose, George,” his mother said coldly. “I did not forbid it, but I could hardly be said to consent. The poor girl may be well favoured; I do not deny it.”

“Who could deny it?” George exclaimed, with some heat.

“I said I did not deny it; but her relations are, methinks, very coarse.”

“Mother, there is not a gentler lady in the land than Mistress Gifford. If you doubt my word inquire of Mr. Sidney or Lady Mary.”

“There is no occasion for this heat, George; it is unbecoming.”

“Pardon, my mother, but I cannot brook hearing Mistress Gifford and Mistress Lucy put down as coarse. Coarse!” he repeated—“it is too much! They can’t help themselves that their father chose to marry a virago like their stepmother. More shame to him; no shame to them.”

“Well-a-day, George, you are really upsetting me. I can hear no more. Stop this tirade, or I shall swoon; you know I never am fitted to bear loud voices, or con-

tention and strife. You have bidden the girl to sup, and, as your cousin Dolly will be here, it will not be amiss for once. But I never desire to have intercourse with the folk at Ford Place. Although I am a widow, I must not forget your father's standing. I visit at the Castle, and dear Lady Mary is so good as to call me her friend. Thus, to be a friend of Mistress Forrester also is beyond my wish or desire, and surely you could not desire it."

George did not reply at first, then he said,—

"Mr. Philip Sidney does not despise Mistress Gifford; indeed, it is true, there is no scorn in him towards anyone that breathes, save only against mean cowards, liars and traitors. But I wish you a good-night, mother. I have to see how the mare does that foaled this morning. She is of great value to me, and I would fain save her life, if may be."

When her son was gone, Mistress Ratcliffe resigned herself to meditation.

"He is in love with that child, poor, silly boy. She may be pretty, but it is the beauty which soon fades. I must keep Dolly with me. She has a pretty fortune, if not a fair face, and is of our blood, and a meet match for my home-loving son. I have other hopes for Humphrey. He will wed with some gentlewoman about the Court. If Mr. Philip Sidney wills to bring it about, it is done. Then I shall be a proud, happy mother, and I shall get out my taffeta with the old lace, and the ornaments I have not worn since my husband died, to do honour to the wedding. Humphrey will be knighted some fine day, and then he shall raise the family again to its proper level."

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CHAPTER II.

IN THE PARK.

Sidney's sister, Pembroke's mother.—BEN JONSON.

THE dew lay upon the grass the next morning, and the eastern rays of the rising sun had but just shot across the slopes of Penshurst Park, when Philip Sidney passed from under the great gateway of the noble house—or castle, for it was embattled, by the king's leave, in the reign of Edward IV.—and crossed the turf towards the avenue of beeches now clothed in the tenderest hues of spring.

He was at this time in high favour at Court. The cloud which his brave protest against the Queen's marriage with the Duke of Anjou had cast over him had passed away, and he was again the favourite on whom Elizabeth smiled, and from whom she expected and received due homage. But the perpetual demands made by Elizabeth on her admiring courtiers was often felt to be irksome.

The chains might be silken, but they were, nevertheless, binding, and it was a relief to Philip Sidney to escape from the atmosphere of the Court at times, to breathe the pure air of his home in the fair land of Kent.

Penshurst Place was, and is, one of the most beautiful of the stately homes of England.

On this April morning the long *façade* was smiling in the early rays of the sun, and, as Philip crossed the Park he turned, and, looking back at it, felt stirring within him that pride of race and home, which is perhaps one of the strongest points in the character of a well-born Englishman.

“A fair inheritance, doubtless,” he said. “All things are fair save where sin and wrong enters. Why should my good Languet have grudged me my retirement, and rejoice that I have again gone forth into the troublesome world. Success at Court is dearly bought, and I must ever bear about with me a burden which no mortal eye sees.”

As Philip Sidney paced under the shadow of the beeches, the deep bronze of fallen leaves at his feet glowing here and there into living gold, as the low rays of the eastern sun shone through the branches, thinly veiled, as yet, with tender green, to any casual observer, he did not wear the appearance of a man whose heart knew any bitterness or was weighted with any burden.

His light figure, with its easy swing as he walked, the perfect symmetry of every limb, the pose of his well-shaped head, from which he had removed the small cap with its short plume, raising his face that the fresh air might fan it, were all in harmony with the pride and glory of his young manhood. Suddenly his eyes shone with a smile of welcome, as a lady came from under the great chestnuts, which were already spreading their fan-like leaves from every branch, and exclaimed,—

“Ah! sister mine, I little thought I should find you

before me breathing the soft pure air. It has brought the colour to your cheeks which I love to see."

"Methinks those who lie a-bed late lose the best of the day, Philip, and how surpassingly lovely Penshurst is."

"Wilton does not make it less dear, then, Mary."

"Nay, both are beautiful, and," she added, "both are home now; but tender thoughts ever cling to the place where childhood has been passed. And how fares it with you, dear brother?" the Countess of Pembroke said, as she put her hand within Philip's arm.

"But ill, Mary. I strive, God knoweth, to conquer, but I cannot, I cannot."

"Nay, Philip, you shall not say so. You must conquer."

"If I could free myself from the chain—if I could—but it maddens me, Mary, to think she loved me, and that I was so blind, so blind. She is the wife of a man she loathes, and I—I am to blame. I, who would have died for her."

"Live for her, Philip. Live to show her all that is noble and pure in your life, and so do her good and not evil. Yes, dear brother, by nurturing this love you do her a worse evil than you know of. Sure, you would not bring her to a new misery, a worse misery."

"No, no. I would not, yet I would. But the sting lies here; hearken, Mary, to this sonnet, lately penned:—

"I might—unhappy word! O me! I might,
And then would not, or could not, see my bliss
Till now, wrapped in a most infernal night,
I find how heavenly day—wretch! I did miss.

Heart, rend thyself, thou dost thyself but right.
 No lovely Paris made thy Helen his;
 No force, no fraud, robbed thee of thy delight;
 Nor Fortune of thy fortune author is.
 But to myself, myself did give the blow,
 While too much wit, forsooth, so troubled me,
 That I respects, for both our sakes, must show.
 And yet could not by rising morn foresee
 How fair a day was near—O punished eyes!
 That I had been more foolish, or more wise!”
Astrophel and Stella, Sonnet XXXIII.

“Dear brother,” the Countess of Pembroke said,—
 “these wild laments are not worthy of you. You shall
 not make any man moan. You will conquer at last,
 and come out of the fight a nobler man. The very
 beauty around us seems to bid us rejoice to-day.
 Come, let us speak of happier themes. You will like
 to see my little Will, and carry back good news of him
 to the Queen, whose god-son he is. Tell her she
 hath a brave knight in store in our little Will. You
 scarce ever saw such tricks as he has, and is not yet
 one year old.”

Philip Sidney threw off his melancholy mood at his
 sister's bidding, and, looking down at her, kissed her
 pure, fair forehead.

“Pembroke has reason to rejoice in possessing your
 love, Mary, and I doubt not the boy is worthy of you,
 though he does not, or did not, when I saw him, resemble
 you.”

“No, he is far handsomer; he has dark eyes and
 lashes; they lay curled upon his fair cheeks, making the
 only shadow there. Will has not the amber-coloured
 hair of us Sidneys.”

As this brother and sister stood together in the morning light under the spreading boughs of the trees, they bore a striking similarity to each other.

Theirs was not the mere beauty of form and feature, though that was in both remarkable.

Intellectual power was seen in the wide, straight brow, and the light of that inner fire we call genius shone in the eyes. It has been said by contemporary records that Philip Sidney's beauty was too feminine in its character; but, if in colouring of hair and complexion and delicate outline of feature, this might be true; there was wonderful strength of purpose in the mouth and upward curve of the chin which indicated resolution and courage, and determination to conquer difficulties.

His sister's words were to come true, "You will conquer at last, and come out of the fight a nobler man."

"We must turn homewards now. How long do you tarry here, Philip?"

"But two or three days. Shall we not journey to London in company, Mary. This tournament needs much preparation; I did but snatch a few days to speak on our father's affairs and to breathe freely for a short space, and then I must return."

Philip Sidney sighed.

"Nay, Philip, what hardship is there in being the favourite of the Queen, save for the jealousy it may breed. Our good Uncle Leicester tells marvellous tales of the manner in which the fair ladies of the Court are ever ready to smile on you, to say nought of the Queen's own delight to have you near her. She seems to have forgotten your former protest against the Duke of Anjou, and to believe in your approval now."

"It is scarce approval, Mary, but the Queen must do as she lists. She is of an age to discern what is best for herself and her realm."

"She is, indeed, of an age to do so," Mary said, with a silvery laugh. "But queens never grow old, they leave the process to humbler folk, Philip."

They had reached the house now, and passed under the gateway into the quadrangle, just as the big bell was making a great clamour with its iron, merciless tongue.

"Breakfast is served," the Countess said, "and our good mother will already be on the dais awaiting us. Would that our father were here with her. He will be present at the tournament, and I will do my utmost to persuade him to take a month of summer here at Penshurst, and dismiss all care for the time."

Lady Mary welcomed her son and daughter with a glad smile. She had also been astir early, looking into the affairs of her household, in the home where the unbroken family so seldom met now. Lady Mary's life had been a chequered one, and she had suffered much as a wife, from the unfair treatment her brave, noble husband, Sir Henry Sidney, had received at the Queen's hand.

He was poor in purse and wounded in heart for his service in Ireland, from which he returned at last, losing everything but honour. He was also Lord President of Wales, and received small thanks for all he did in the interests of the Principality, and less gratitude. When breakfast was concluded, Lady Mary Sidney summoned Philip to a conference with her in the small ante-room,

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which was reached by a stone staircase at the upper end of the large hall.

"You came hither, my son, as your good father's officer. How do you feel towards this scheme? If my husband, your father, be sent for the fourth time to Ireland, will you accompany him, and serve him with the wisdom you ever show, Philip? It is time your father's services should gain some reward. Speak, Philip; do not hang back, but let me hear your mind."

"Ah, sweet mother," Philip said, seating himself on a settle at his mother's side, and taking her hand in his, "do not think I slight my good father, or disparage all his great service for Ireland, if I say I cannot advise him to move in this matter. I was amazed when Molineux came charged with this mission to Court, and I told him I disapproved the appeal being made. For myself, I could not go thither to Ireland in the capacity my father speaks of; and as to the Queen conferring on him a title of nobility or large estates, she will never do it. I know this much, and I counsel my father to let the matter rest. He is held in respect at Ludlow, he has our own fair home of Penshurst as an inheritance, why, then, enfeebled in health, should he seek to be embroiled for the fourth time in the affairs of that unhappy country of Ireland? Misfortune followed his earlier footsteps there, is it to be counted on that as a man prematurely old and worn, he should have better success, say rather win more gratitude. Nay, dearest and best of wives and mothers, let me beg of you to dissuade my father from this project."

"Philip," Lady Sidney replied, with some heat, "my heart throbs with indignation when I think of the treat-

ment your noble father has received at the hands of the royal mistress he has served with honest devotion. He is no smooth-tongued courtier, Philip; he has taken no lessons in the school of flattery, and for this he is cast aside and misused. Think," Lady Sidney said, "think, Philip, of the scant and mean allowance of twenty pounds weekly he receives as President of Wales. Forsooth, to keep up any fitting dignity in our mansion it costs us thrice that sum. And if it is complained that I am with my dear spouse, and so add to the cost, sure I am worth my meat, of which my poor scarred face is a token. Scarce ever do I see these scars but I remember how I caught that baleful disease, from which God keep you, my son. Should He visit you with it, may you be tended with the care wherewith I tended the Queen's highness, when most of her attendants stood far off. Nay, Philip, I fear you are in danger of forgetting the past service your parents have rendered, in the glamour of the present favour shown to you at Court."

Lady Mary Sidney's voice trembled, and tears sprang to her eyes.

Philip could never brook the sight of his mother's distress; and he knew all she said was perfectly true and could not be contradicted.

"I will confer with my father on this matter," he said. "Dear mother, do not, I pray you, deem me hard and indifferent. As soon as this entertainment of the Ambassadors from France is over, I will set about inquiring into the aspect of affairs, and find out my Lord Burleigh's views. If I see cause to change my mind, I will not be too proud to own it."

"That is like my noble Philip," his mother said.

“Ah, my son, this heavy money trouble as to debts and ceaseless claims, makes of me an old woman, far more than the scars of the dire disease which snatched away my beauty twenty years ago. You were but a little fellow then, but then, as now, wise beyond your years. It was hard for me to meet your inquiring gaze, and to hear the smothered sigh as you looked on your mother’s changed face. While little Mary drew back from my offered kiss, and cried out, ‘It is not my pretty mother,’ you put your arms round me, saying to her, ‘It is our own dear mother, Mary. Fie then, for shame,’ as she struggled to get away from the woman who tried to force her to kiss me.” Then with the swift change of mood which characterised Lady Sidney she stroked Philip’s cheek, and said laughing,—“How many fair ladies are sighing for your favour, my son? Truly the hearts of many must be in danger of capture. Wit, wisdom, learning and beauty such as yours do not often go hand in hand.”

“Nay; now, mother mine, I shall say you have taken lessons in the school of flattery, for which you were ready to take me to task not long ago. But I must away to look round the stables, and see to the proper equipment of the men who will ride with me to the tourney at Whitehall next month.”

Lucy Forrester found her household duties irksome the next morning.

A wrangle with her stepmother had ended in a stormy scene, when Mrs. Forrester gave Lucy a sudden box on the ear for neglecting to replenish the fire on the open hearth with wood, so that when it was time to

hang up the kettle to boil the meat for the dinner, served at eleven o'clock to the family, there were only a few smouldering white ashes left.

"As if I cared a groat for you! Box the other ear if you like, and kindle your own fire, for me."

"You shall not have bite or sup in this house to-day," Mrs. Forrester screamed, as Lucy darted out of the kitchen, answering,—

"I don't want your food. I know where I shall be better served."

With flashing eyes and heightened colour, Lucy found herself face to face, on the strip of rough ground before the house, with Humphrey Ratcliffe.

"Mistress Lucy," he exclaimed, "whither are you rushing like a whirlwind?"

"Anywhere, to get out of hearing of that tongue. Hark, now, it is still wagging like the clapper of a bell."

"Where is Mistress Gifford?" Humphrey asked, without taking any notice of Lucy's reference to the quarrel which he guessed had been raging.

"Oh, it's Mary you want to see, not me," Lucy said. "Well, she is gone up to the shepherd's hut to look after a sick child there. She has got the boy with her, and I promised to see to the fire on the hearth, but I didn't, and that is the cause of the uproar. But, good Master Humphrey, help me to get to London to see the great tourney. Oh!" clasping her hands in entreaty, "I pray you help me to get there. I am so sick of this place. Why should I be kept here till I am old?"

"That is a-far off day, Mistress Lucy," Humphrey

said. "But I have a plan which, if it succeeds, may give you your desire."

"Oh, you are good, Master Humphrey, so good!"

"My mother wishes to see London again, and I can provide her with lodgings not far from Whitehall. It may be there will be a corner for you, that is to say, if Mistress Gifford approves."

"I'll make her approve, I warrant. I am to sup with Mistress Ratcliffe this evening, and I will be as meek as a lamb and curtsey my lowest to her, and call her madam, and be ever so smiling to Master George. I'll win favour for once."

Humphrey discreetly forbore to let Lucy know that it was at George's earnest desire he had determined to make this proposal to their mother.

"Tell me, Master Humphrey, will Mr. Sidney be coming this way to-day?"

"It may be; he had to choose two extra horses from George's stalls for the journey. George himself is, of course, to be in attendance, and one of our serving men as groom. It is possible that Mr. Sidney may be coming either to-day or on the morrow."

"He will not pass without seeing Mary. I wish—"

But Lucy had not time to say what the wish was, for Mary Gifford and her little son were now seen coming along a field path which led down the hillside from the open country beyond.

Humphrey stepped forward quickly to meet them, and lifted Ambrose over the stile, in spite of his declaration that he could get over by himself.

Humphrey tossed the child high in the air before he set him on his legs again, and then said to Mary,—

"Out on a mission of mercy, as is your wont, Mistress Gifford."

Mary's colour rose as she said,—

"The sick and poor are always in the world."

"And the sad also," Humphrey said, with an appealing look, which Mary understood only too well.

"Come and see the little chickies, Master Humphrey," Ambrose said. "There's three little ducks amongst them. Aunt Lou put the eggs under the old mother for fun. Grannie does not know, and when the little ducklings waddle off to the pond, she'll be in a fright, and think they'll all be drowned, and so will the hen."

But Humphrey scarcely heeded the child's chatter, he was earnestly looking at Mary Gifford's face.

Surely there must be some fresh cause of trouble there, for he thought he saw traces of recent tears.

Little Ambrose, finding his appeal to Humphrey took no effect, scampered off to the poultry yard, Lucy following. She thought it would be wiser to leave Humphrey to plead her cause, and persuade Mary that if his mother would consent to her journey to London, she was better out of the way when Mary raised objections to the fulfilment of her wishes.

"Is there any new cause of trouble, Mistress Gifford," Humphrey asked.

"Nothing new—as you take the word."

"Nought in which I can be of help?"

Mary hesitated, and Humphrey said,—

"The wrangles and quarrels yonder are on the increase. Is that so?" he asked. "I heard loud voices when I came up to the house a short time ago, and

Lucy rushed out with flaming cheeks and sparkling eyes."

"Poor child," Mary said, "I will not say there is not blame on both sides, but the life we lead yonder becomes more and more hard. It is ill training for my little son to see angry passions raging, and to hear loud reproaches."

"I know it! I know it!" Humphrey exclaimed. "End it, Mary—end it for ever, and come and bless me with your love."

"Nay, Humphrey, do not urge me to do what is impossible. It cannot be."

Humphrey Ratcliffe turned away with an impatient gesture, saying,—

"I see no glory in self-martyrdom. I offer you a home, and I swear to protect you from all evil, and keep your boy from evil, train him to be a noble gentleman, and, forsooth, you turn away and will have none of me."

"Dear friend," Mary began in a low voice, "trust me so far as to believe that I have a reason—a good reason—for refusing what would be, I doubt not, a haven of calm after the troubled waters of my life. Trust me, kind Master Ratcliffe, nor think ill of me, I pray you."

"Ill of you! nay, Mary, you know no saint in heaven is ever more devoutly worshipped than I worship you." But, seeing her distress as he said these words, he went on,—“I will wait, I will bide my time, and, meanwhile, serve you in all ways I can. Here is this child, your young sister, chafing against the life she leads here. I will do my best to persuade my mother to

take her in her company to London for the grand show, and it may be that some great lady may take a fancy for her, and she may win a place as waiting-woman about the person of some Court dame. Do you consent? Do you give me permission to try?"

"But Lucy is not in favour with your mother; she disdains us as beneath her notice."

"Not you—not Lucy; it is your father's widow whom she dislikes. Her Puritan whims and fancies are a cause of offence, and no aversions are so strong as those begotten by religious difference."

"That is so, alas!" Mary Gifford said. "Persecution for diversity of faith, rather for diversity in the form of worship: it is this that tears this country into baleful divisions, and pierces it with wounds which are slow to heal."

"That is true," Humphrey said; "and the law, condemning all Papists to suffer extreme penalty, if found worshipping God after their own manner, has a cruel significance. But we must not forget the fires of Smithfield, nor the horrors to which this country was subjected when Spanish influence was at work with a Papist queen on the throne."

"No," Mary said in a low voice. "Nor can we forget the grey head of that queen's dearest friend, which was brought to the block, and stirred the bitterness of revenge in Queen Mary's heart."

"Well," Humphrey said, "I am vowed to resist, with all possible might, the encroachments of Spain,—which means the plotting of Philip to force the religion of the Pope upon an unwilling people—in the Low Countries first, and then, believe me, he will not stop there. Mr.

Sidney's protest against the Queen's marriage with the Duc of Anjou was founded on the horror he felt of seeing this realm given over once more to the power of the Pope. Mr. Sidney saw, with his own eyes, the Massacre of St. Bartholomew; and what security could there be if any of this crafty Medici race should be set on high in this country?"

"Mr. Sidney has changed somewhat in his views. Is it not so?" Mary asked.

"He has submitted to the inevitable—that is to say, finding the Queen determined, he, with Lord Burleigh and others in high office, will confer with the ambassadors who come from France for the purpose—praying secretly, however, that the whole matter may fall to pieces. And, indeed, this is likely. The Queen's highness is loth to lose her supremacy, and there are favourites at Court who would ill brook to be displaced by a rival power. My lord the Earl of Leicester is one, though he hides his real feeling from his nephew, my noble master."

Mary Gifford was silent for a few moments, then she said,—

"If you can aid my poor little sister to get her heart's desire, do so. I consent, for life here is not to be desired for many reasons. Ah! Master Ratcliffe," Mary said, "how fair is this world, and is there a fairer spot in it than these our native hills and valleys over which we look every day? See the wooded heights yonder, in all the varied colours of the early spring; see the sloping pastures, where the flowers make a carpet! Often as I look on it, and see the tower of the church rising amongst the red-tiled roofs of the cottages, and beyond,

the stately pile of Penshurst Castle, I think if only sin were absent, and truth and righteousness reigned, this village would find no rival save in the Eden before the serpent entered, and the ruin came with sin!"

Humphrey Ratcliffe liked to watch Mary's face as she spoke; but, as he left her, a few minutes later, he felt there was something which divided them and made his suit hopeless. What was it?

He knew but little of the history of her short married life. Her suitor had come in the train of the Earl of Leicester in one of his visits to Penshurst.

That she had been cruelly deceived was known, and that she had come back to her old home of Ford Manor with her child, clad in the weeds of widowhood, but saying nothing of what had really happened. Rumour had been busy, and Ambrose Gifford had been supposed to have been slain in a disgraceful fight; but nothing was absolutely certain; and Humphrey Ratcliffe, who had known Mary from her girlhood, now discovered that he had loved her always, and that he had failed to win her in her early youth because he had never tried to do so, and now that he loved her passionately, he was to find his suit was hopeless.

Perhaps it was the similarity between his own case and that of his master's that made the tie between them stronger than is often the case between an esquire and his chief.

CHAPTER III.

A STRANGE MEETING.

“Before the door sat self-consuming Care,
Day and night keeping wary watch and ward
For fear lest Force or Fraud should unaware
Break in, and spoil the treasure there in gard.”
SPENSER.

LUCY FORRESTER soon forgot the vexation and anger which her stepmother's scolding had roused. She kept out of her sight, and entertained little Ambrose with stories of fairies and elves and imps and hobgoblins till the time came for her to go up the hill to the Ratcliffes' house.

Lucy did not attempt to sit down at the board when dinner was served at eleven o'clock. She had once or twice, when in disgrace, rebelled at the sight of the crust of bread and the mug of water which had been set before her as a token of Mistress Forrester's displeasure.

“I am not a child now,” she thought, “to be gaped at by serving men and maids. I will take care of myself in the buttery, and then get ready for my walk up the hill. Perhaps, who knows, I may chance to meet Mr. Sidney, and I may get a word from him or a rare smile; and then a fig for frowns and the rating and scolding of fifty cross step-mothers! I wish Mary did

not look so grave. I hate to grieve her. Well-a-day, if only I can get to London, and see him in the tourney, I shall die of joy."

Lucy was scarcely sixteen, an enthusiastic child, who had conceived a romantic devotion for Mr. Philip Sidney, and worshipped his ideal as maidens of her temperament have worshipped at their idol's shrine since time began.

And who can blame this country maiden if she cherished a passionate admiration for one, who won the hearts of Court ladies and hoary statesmen, of a grave scholar like Hubert Languet, and of the Queen herself, who called him the brightest jewel of her Court, and who often excited the jealousy of her older favourites by the marks of favour she bestowed on him.

In the village church on Sundays Lucy would sit with anxious, eager expectation till she saw the Sidney pew filled; if Mr. Sidney was present it was an hour or two of bliss; if, as was frequently the case, his place was empty, she would bow her head to hide the tears of vexation and disappointment which started to her eyes.

Nor have these dreams of youthful romance wholly passed away. Even in the rush and hurry of the prosaic world at the end of the nineteenth century they yet give a certain pleasure of unfulfilled longings to some young hearts, and fade away like the early cloud and morning dew, to leave behind only a memory of mingled pain and sweetness, recalled in after time with something of self-pity and something of surprise that such things had ever seemed real and not visionary,

and had touched the warm springs in the heart now chilled, it may be, by the stern exigencies of this transitory life.

It must be said that few idols have been worthier of youthful adoration than was this true knight at whose shrine Lucy laid her heart. If there were spots in the sun, "wandering isles of night," which were at this time somewhat darkening its lustre, they were unknown to Lucy Forrester. Philip Sidney was to her all that was noble, pure, and true, and, as she put on her prettiest cap, with its long veil and little edge of seed pearls, Mary's gift, and crossed her finest kerchief across her breast, she saw herself in the bit of polished steel which served for her mirror, and smiled as she thought,—

"What if I meet him on the way, he may look at me with some approval. I cannot help it. I do love to be fair, and why should I pretend I am ugly, even to myself. No," she went on turning her graceful head, first to the right and then to the left, before the little mirror; "no, I can't pretend to be ugly, like Doll Ratcliffe, who makes eyes at poor old George. She may have him, ay, and welcome, for all I care."

Lucy was pirouetting round the confined space of her attic chamber, which was bare enough of all ornament, and mean and humble in its furniture, when little Ambrose's feet were heard on the wooden stairs leading to this upper story of the old house, and he called, in his loud, childish treble,—

"Aunt Lou, you are to come down and see Mr. Sidney."

Lucy clasped her small hands together in an ecstasy of delight.

"Is it true—is it true, Ambrose? Child, is it true?"

"I always say true things, mother saith lies are wicked," the boy exclaimed. "You are very pretty, Aunt Lou. I like you. I wish mother would wear red gowns, and—and—"

But Lucy paid no heed to the child's compliments. She gave a parting look at the mirror, and then brushed past little Ambrose and went downstairs with a beating heart.

Mr. Sidney was standing on the rough ground before Ford Place, leaning against the gnarled trunk of an ancient thorn tree, which had yet life enough left in it to put forth its tiny, round buds of pink and white, soon to open and fill the air with fragrance.

By his side Mary Gifford stood, with her face turned towards the smiling landscape before her.

Philip Sidney, with the courtesy of the true gentleman, advanced to Lucy with his cap in his hand, bending the knee, and greeting her with all the grace and courtly ceremony with which he would have greeted the highest lady in the land.

The girl's face shone with proud delight, and the young voice trembled a little as she said, in answer to his question,—

"I thank you, sir, I am well and hearty."

"I need scarce ask the question," Mr. Sidney said. "With your good sister's approval, I came to inquire if you would care to fill the vacant place in my sister the Countess of Pembroke's household. She leaves Penshurst shortly, and will be at Leicester House before

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returning to Wilton. One of her gentlewomen is summoned to her father's death-bed, and Mistress Crawley, her bower-woman, needs help. I am not learned in the secrets of the toilette, but you would soon learn what might be expected of you."

"And shall I see the great show, sir—shall I see the tourney and the knights tilting?" Lucy said, unable to repress her joy.

"Doubtless," Mr. Sidney replied laughing. "But, Mistress Lucy, it will not be all play. Mistress Crawley is a somewhat stern task-mistress. My sister bade me say as much. Therefore, consider the proposal well, and consult Mistress Gifford, than whom you cannot have a wiser counsellor."

"Mary," Lucy exclaimed, "I may go to serve my Lady of Pembroke? Speak, Mary."

Mary Gifford now turned towards Lucy and Mr. Sidney. Up to this time she had averted her face.

"You must remember, Lucy," she said gently, "Mr. Sidney's words. It will not be all play, and, methinks, you have often shown impatience of control and undue heat when your will is crossed."

Lucy's face flushed crimson, as she answered,—

"It is not kind to say this, Mary. You know—you must know how hard it is to please the one who rules here."

"I know it, dear child, full well," Mary said. "But we must not hinder Mr. Sidney longer. It will be only right to consult our stepmother, and crave leave of Mr. Sidney to defer an answer till the morrow."

"By all means, Mistress Gifford, do so," Philip Sidney said.

While these words had passed between the two sisters, little Ambrose had been curiously stroking the hilt of Mr. Sidney's sword, and fingering the wide ends of the belt which held it in its place.

"Oh," the child said, "I hope I shall have a sword when I am a man, and go to battle with you, sir. Will you take me with you when I am big and strong?"

"Will I not!" Mr. Sidney said. "The time may come when I shall want to gather all loyal hearts round me for service. I'll not forget you, Ambrose, if so it chances."

"You are but a little child, my son," Mary said, with a sudden gesture, putting her arm round him. "You must stay with your mother for a long, long time, and be a dutiful son."

"I am near seven years old, and I can fling a stone further than Giles, the cowherd's boy, and I can bend a bow, and—"

"Hush, my little son," Mary Gifford said. "Do not chatter of your doings. Mr. Sidney does not care to hear of them."

"Strength of limb is good," Philip said, "but strength of will is better, little Ambrose. Strive to be a dutiful son to the best of mothers. A fatherless boy has to do his utmost to have a care of his mother."

The child left Philip Sidney's side, and went to his mother, who had turned away her face, with an exclamation of distress.

"Fatherless," she repeated; "ay, and worse than fatherless!"

But the words did not reach Mr. Sidney's ears. His

groom was waiting for him at the gate leading to the lane, and, taking Ambrose by the hand, he said,—

“Come with me, boy, and I will give you a ride to the end of the lane; and do you, Mistress Lucy, follow, and take back the young horseman when I have put him down, if it please you.”

“I will come also,” Mary Gifford said hastily.

She could scarcely bear her boy out of her sight, and watched him with anxious eyes, as Sir Philip set him on the saddle, across which his small legs could scarcely stride, the child dumb with delight, his eyes sparkling, his little hands clutching the bridle-rein, and his figure drawn up to its full height.

“Oh, have a care, Ambrose,” Mary exclaimed.

Mr. Sidney laughed.

“He shall come to no harm, Mistress Gifford. My hand is ready to stop him if he falls. But, indeed, there is no fear; he sits square and upright, like a man.”

The beautiful, well-trained horse arched his neck in reply to his master’s “Softly, Hero—quietly,” as he stepped out, raising his feet deliberately, with that stately air which marks high breeding, and pacing down the rugged path of the lane, with slow and measured tread, Mr. Sidney at his side, the groom in attendance following with the other horse.

“Oh, I would like to ride like thus far, far away,” the boy said, as Mr. Sidney lifted him down, and set him by his mother’s side.

“Make Mr. Sidney your bow, and say you are grateful to him for this great kindness, Ambrose.”

The child was almost too excited to speak, but Mr.

Sidney sprang lightly into the saddle, and, with a parting smile to Lucy, with the words, "We shall await your decision, Mistress Forrester," he rode away, the groom following.

Lucy stood at the turn of the road, watching the horses and the riders, till they had disappeared, and then she returned to the house with Mary, like the child, too happy to speak. They reached the house together, and were met by Mrs. Forrester.

She had heard of Mr. Sidney's visit, and had hastened upstairs to exchange her coarse home-spun for a gown of grey taffeta and a kirtle of the same colour; a large white cap or hood was set a little awry on her thin, grey hair.

"You might have had the grace to ask Mr. Sidney to step in," she said sharply to Mary Gifford. "It is ill manners to stand chaffering outside when the mistress of a house would fain offer a cup of mead to her guest. But I never look for aught but uncivil conduct from either of you. What are you pranked out for like this?" she asked, addressing Lucy.

"I am going to sup with Mistress Ratcliffe. You needn't look so cross. I sha'n't trouble you long. I am going to Court with my Lady Pembroke, and I may never darken your doors again."

"You'll get into mischief like your sister before you, I'll warrant, and if you do, don't come back here, for I'll shut the door in your face, as sure as my name is Anne Forrester."

"Have no fear," Lucy said. "I am away now by the path across the hills."

"Nay, Lucy!" Mary exclaimed. "Nay, by the

highway is best. The hill path is lonesome. Stay, Lucy."

But Lucy was gone, and Mary, looking after her retreating figure, could not gainsay Mistress Forrester, as she said,—

"Wilful, headstrong little baggage, she will rue her behaviour some fine day, as you have done."

"Mother," Mary Gifford said, in a troubled voice, "do not be for ever reproaching me in the hearing of others, it is cruel. It may be better for you and for me if I leave my father's house, and seek some humble refuge with my boy."

But this did not suit Mistress Forrester's views. Mary Gifford was far too useful to her. She could write, and manage the accounts of the farm; she could, by a few calm words, effect more with lazy or careless serving men and maids than their mistress did by scolding and reproofs, often accompanied with a box on the ear or a sharp blow across the shoulder to enforce what she said.

It would not answer Mistress Forrester's purpose to let Mary Gifford go, so she said,—

"Hoity, toity! don't talk like that. It's folly to say you will leave a good home when you have no home to go to. Bide here, and let bygones be bygones. I am ready to be friendly if you'll let me. I must away now to see about the two sick lambs; it's all along of the shepherd's ill treatment of the ewe that I am like to lose 'em."

Mistress Forrester bustled away, and Mary Gifford was left with Ambrose, who was making a hobby-horse

of a thick stick, scampering up and down, and calling out,—

“Gee-up, Hero! I’m off to the fight with Mr. Sidney.”

Mary looked at the boy with a strange, wistful smile.

“Poor child!” she murmured, “poor child! he hath no young comrades with whom to make merry. It is well he can be so jocund and happy. It is true what Mistress Forester saith, I have no home, and I must bide quietly here, for the boy is safe, and who can tell to what danger I might not expose him if I ventured forth with him into the world again.”

Lucy Forrester went gaily across the open ground, fearless of any danger from horned cattle, of which there were several feeding on the short sweet grass.

She sang as she went, out of the gladness of her heart; triumph, too, mingled with the gladness.

How surprised Mistress Ratcliffe would be to hear she was to be a waiting-woman to my lady the Countess of Pembroke. George had thought of asking his mother to take her to London. Humphrey had spoken of a corner being found for her. Now, what did it matter whether Mistress Ratcliffe consented or not to her son’s desire. She had no need to be beholden to her. She would be lodged in a grand house, and have a place with the ladies of the Countess’s household.

Remembering how Mistress Ratcliffe had often looked down upon her and Mary, it was a keen delight to her to feel how chagrined she would be at her unexpected good fortune.

It was not absolutely settled yet, but she was sure Mary would give consent, and, on the morrow, after service in the church, she would be admitted to the grand house at Penshurst, and see the Countess herself, and perhaps Mr. Philip Sidney.

Perched on a stile to rest, Lucy indulged in a prolonged meditation on the fair prospect which had so unexpectedly opened before her. Of course Mary would make no real objection. No one ever did resist Mr. Philip Sidney's will, and it was he who had proposed the scheme, and he wished her to be one of his sister's waiting-women.

This gave the poor, little fluttering heart the most intense pleasure, which she could scarcely dare to acknowledge, even to herself. Still, had not Mr. Sidney come to offer the coveted place to her—come himself? And had he not beamed on her with his beautiful smile? Yes, and with admiring eyes!

How long Lucy might have indulged in these thoughts it is impossible to say, had she not been suddenly conscious that she was not alone.

Stealthy footsteps were heard approaching from behind, and, turning her head, she saw a tall man, wearing a long cloak, much the worse for wear, and a hat, with neither band nor feather, pulled down over his eyes.

Lucy started, and jumped from the stile, her heart beating violently, and her face, which a few moments before had been radiant with pleasure, pale and frightened.

"Whither away, little maiden; why so scared?" the man said. "I mean no harm. See!" he said, taking

a rosary from under his cloak, "see, I kiss the blessed cross, in token that you need not fear. I am a poor Catholic, hiding from persecutors, wandering about and living in dens and caves of the earth."

Lucy had, in her short life, heard nothing but condemnation of Papists. When she thought of them at all, it was with horror, and her knees trembled under her, and her voice was scarcely audible as she said,—

"Prithee, sir, suffer me to pass."

"On one condition. You know a house called Ford Place?"

"Ay, sir, I do; and I will run back thither and—"

"You will *not* do so, little maiden; you will tell me how it fares with a gentlewoman there, called Mary Gifford?"

"She is well, sir; she is—"

"Hearken! She has a boy named Ambrose. I would fain see him. Bring him hither to me, and I will call on all the saints to bless you. Our Lady shall watch over you and grant you your heart's desire."

"I cannot do it, sir; I dare not! Let me pass. If you would fain see the boy, go to the house."

"And be seized and taken off before the grand folk down yonder and imprisoned, and, it may be, tortured. Hearken," he went on, bringing his face unpleasantly near Lucy's, "hearken, I can call down blessings on you, but I can call down bitter curses also. Your heart's desire shall be denied you, you shall eat the bread of affliction and drink the water of tears, if you betray me. If you keep my secret, and let me see that boy, blessings shall be showered on you; choose now."

Poor Lucy was but a child, she had scarcely counted out sixteen years. This strange man, with his keen dark eyes gleaming under the black cap and looking as if they read her very soul, seemed to get her into his power. She was faint with terror, and looked round in vain for help, for some one to come who would deliver her from her trouble.

With a cry of delight she sprang again on the topmost rung of the stile, as she saw George Ratcliffe's giant form appearing in the distance on the slope of a rising ground.

The hillside was covered in this part with great hillocks of heather and gorse.

Apparently her persecutor had also caught sight of the approaching figure, for he relaxed his hold on her wrist, which he had seized as she had sprung up on the stile, and, looking back when she had run some distance towards George, she saw that the man had disappeared.

"George! George!" she cried, as he came with great strides towards her, and, to his intense satisfaction, even in his dismay at her apparent distress, threw herself into his arms. "George! a dreadful man, a Papist, has scared me. He will curse me, George. Oh! it is terrible to be cursed. Save me from him."

George looked about in bewilderment.

"I see no man. There is no one near, Lucy. I see no one."

"Did you not see him as you came in sight?"

"Nay, I was thinking only of you, and hoping to meet you on your way. I saw no man, nor did I see you till I had come up yonder rising ground, just as

you mounted the stile. Be not so distressed," George said, "we will scour the country for the villain, for villain he must be if he is a Papist; but come now with me. My mother is well-pleased that you should sup with us. Oh! Lucy," George said, with lover-like earnestness, "smile again, I pray you, it goes to my heart to see you thus scared, though without reason, I trust. Will it please you to stay here, while I go and unearth the wretch, and belabour him till there is no breath left in him."

"No, no, George, don't leave me. I should fear to be left alone. Don't, don't leave me."

George was only too willing to remain, and presently Lucy grew calmer, and they walked slowly across the heath together.

George was too happy for many words, and scarcely heeding even Lucy's account of her adventure, in the bliss of having her clinging to his arm, and the memory of that moment when she threw herself upon him for protection and safety.

"What can he want with Ambrose, Mary's child? He tried to make me promise to bring him to that spot, that he might see him. What can it mean? It will frighten Mary when I tell her, for she is ever dismayed if the child is long out of her sight. What can it mean?"

"I cannot say," George replied, dreamily. "Thank God you are safe. That man is some agent of the devil, but I will put Humphrey on the scent, and we will track him out. I have heard there is a nest of Papists hiding in Tunbridge. Doubtless he is one. Forget him now, Lucy; forget him, and be happy."

"He gripped my wrist so hard," Lucy said, holding up her little hand like a child for pity.

It is small wonder that George treated her as a child, and, taking the little hand in his, pressed a fervent kiss upon it.

This seemed to recall Lucy from her clinging, softened mood. She sprang away from George with heightened colour, and said, with all her old brightness,—

"I have news for you. I am going to London to see the tourney, and I am to be one of my Lady of Pembroke's waiting-women. Isn't that grand news?"

Poor George! his dream of bliss was over now.

"Going away!—for how long a space?" he exclaimed.

"Ah! that I cannot tell you, for more weeks or months than I can count, may be."

George, who had with Humphrey done his utmost to persuade their mother to consent to take Lucy with her, in the event of her going to London, without success, or, rather, without a distinct promise that she would do so, was fairly bewildered.

"How did it come about?" he asked.

"Oh! that is a question, indeed, Master Ratcliffe. There is someone you know of who can bring about what he wishes. It is he who has commended me to my Lady Pembroke, hearing, it may be, from your brother, that I wished to see the tourney, and the Queen, and all the fine doings. Mr. Sidney came himself to offer the place of waiting-woman to me."

"Came himself!" George exclaimed.

"And, prithee, why not; am I beneath his notice as I am beneath your mother's? It seems not."

George had not time to reply, for, on the square of turf before the house, Mistress Ratcliffe and her niece, Dorothy Ratcliffe, were apparently awaiting their arrival.

"You are late, George, as is your wont," his mother said. "Doll must make you more mindful of the fixed time for meals. Is this young woman Mistress Forrester's daughter. I bid you kindly welcome."

"I thank you, madam," Lucy said. "I have seen you many a time, and, methinks, you must have seen me; but, doubtless, I was not like to be remembered by such as you and Mistress Dorothy."

The little thrust passed unnoticed. Mistress Ratcliffe merely said,—

"George, lead your cousin Doll to the hall, for supper is served. Mistress Lucy, will you permit me to take your hand?"

Lucy made another curtsy, as George, with a rueful face, obeyed his mother and handed his cousin up the stone steps to the porch, his mother and Lucy following.

Mistress Ratcliffe was attired in her best gown, with a long-pointed waist and tight sleeves slashed with purple. Her ruff rivalled the Queen's in thickness and height; and the heavy folds of her lute-string skirt were held out by a wide hoop, which occupied the somewhat narrow doorway as they entered the hall.

Lucy was more than usually hungry, and did full justice to the pasties and conserves of apples which graced the board. As she looked at Dorothy Ratcliffe her heart swelled with triumph, for she was not slow to notice that the household below the salt cast admiring glances at her, and that Dorothy attracted no attention.

George's spirits had sunk below their accustomed level, and his mother sharply reproved him for inattention to his cousin.

"You are ill performing the duties of a host, George. See, Doll's trencher is empty, and the grace-cup is standing by your elbow unheeded. Are you dreaming, George, or half-asleep?"

"I crave pardon, mother," George said, with a great effort rousing himself. "Now then, cousin Doll, let me carve you a second portion of the pasty; or, mayhap, the wing of this roast pullet will suit your dainty appetite better."

Dorothy pouted.

"I have not such vulgar appetites as some folk. Nay, I thank you, cousin, I will but taste a little whipped cream with a sweet biscuit."

George piled up a mountain of frothy cream on one of the silver plates, which were the pride and glory of his mother. The wooden trenchers were used for the heavier viands; but these silver plates were brought out in honour of guests, for the sweets or fruit which always came at the conclusion of the repast.

These silver plates were kept brightly burnished, and Lucy, as she saw herself reflected in hers, said laughing,—

"It is pleasant to eat off mirrors—that is to say when what we see there is pleasant."

Madame Ratcliffe, although full of satisfaction to have her "household gods" admired, concealed it, and said, with an inclination of her head towards Dorothy,—

"It is no novel thing for you to eat off silver, but

I dare to say it is the first time Mistress Lucy has done so."

"That may be true, madam," Lucy said—she was never at a loss for a rejoinder—"but, methinks, I shall soon eat off silver every day an I choose to do it."

"How so?" asked Mistress Ratcliffe; but the moment the question was asked, she repented showing any curiosity about it, and made a diversion to prevent a reply by suddenly breaking into admiration of the lace which trimmed Dorothy Ratcliffe's bodice.

"It is Flemish point, sure; and did it not descend to you, Doll, from your grandmother? I have a passion for old lace; and these sapphires of your brooch are of fine water. Now, shall we repair to the parlour, and you, Dorothy, will discourse some sweet music on your mandoline."

The parlour was a dark room, with oak panels, and a heavy beam across the ceiling. The floor was polished oak, which was slippery to unwary feet. The open fireplace was filled by a large beau-pot filled with a posy of flowering shrubs and long grass and rushes.

Rushes were strewn on the raised floor of the square bay window. A spinning-wheel stood there, and the stool of carved oak, where Mistress Ratcliffe sat when at her work, that she might have an eye to any who came in at the gate, and perhaps catch one of the serving-maids gossiping with a passer-by.

There was a settle in one corner of the parlour, and a cupboard with shelves in a recess in the thick wall. Here the silver was kept, and some curious old figures which had been, like the plate, handed down

from the ancestors of whom Mistress Ratcliffe was so proud.

In another recess were a few books, in heavy vellum bindings—Tyndale's translation of the Bible, with silver clasps; and some dull sermons, roughly bound, with an early edition of the Boke of Chess; the prayer-book of Edward the Sixth, and some smaller and insignificant volumes, completed Mistress Ratcliffe's library.

Mistress Ratcliffe did not concern herself with the awakening life of these remarkable times in literature and culture.

It was nothing to her that numerous poets and authors, from Edmund Spenser to many humbler craftsmen of the pen, were busy translating from the Italian the tales of Boccaccio, or the Latin of Virgil.

The horizon had not yet widened to the small landed proprietors of these days, and education, as we understand the word, was confined to the few, and had not reached the people to whom the concerns of everyday life were all-important. Women like Mistress Ratcliffe could often scarcely write their own names, and read slowly and with difficulty the psalms in their prayer-book, or the lessons of the Church in their Bible.

Spelling was eccentric, even in the highest circles, as many letters still preserved in family archives prove, and was made to suit the ear and eye of the writer, without reference to rule or form.

The evening passed somewhat slowly. There was an evident restraint upon every one present.

Dorothy's performance on the mandoline did not

elicit much praise, except from Mistress Ratcliffe, who was annoyed that George should seat himself on the settle, by Lucy's side, and encourage her to talk, instead of listening while his cousin sang a melancholy ditty, in anything but a musical voice.

When Dorothy had finished, she laid down the mandoline in a pet, and yawning, said,—

“I am weary after my long ride from Tunbridge, Aunt Ratcliffe. I pray you forgive me if I retire early to bed.”

“Nay, Doll, you must have a cup of spiced wine ere you go, we cannot spare you yet.”

“It is plain I am not wanted, so I can well be spared,” was the reply, with a disagreeable laugh and a jerk of the head in the direction of the settle.

Lucy now sprang up, saying,—

“I, too, must crave leave to bid you good evening, Mistress Ratcliffe. I have to settle plans with my sister before I sleep to-night, and the evening shadows are falling.”

“If you must leave us, Mistress Forrester,” Mistress Ratcliffe said stiffly, “I may as well inform you, with regret, that the plan proposed by my sons for asking you to bear me company to London in a useful capacity, cannot be fulfilled. I take my niece with me, and two serving-men on the second horse, hence—”

“Oh! madam,” Lucy said, “there is no need of excusations. I go to London in the next week as waiting-woman to my lady the Countess of Pembroke. It may be that I shall see you there, and I shall be sure to know you and Mistress Dorothy, and make you my proper reverence, even if you have forgotten me.”

"The impudent little hussy!" Mistress Ratcliffe murmured, but she restrained her feelings, and said,—

"It is fortunate for you, Mistress Forrester, that you will be under due control in London, for in good sooth you will need it. If you must go, good evening."

Lucy turned at the door and made a profound curtsy, then, drawing her kerchief closer to her throat, she left the room, George following.

"I don't set much store by Mistress Forrester's manner, Aunt Ratcliffe," Dorothy said; "an ill-bred country child, who, of course, is ignorant, so we will pardon her."

"Ignorant, yes," Mistress Ratcliffe said, "but her pretty face."

"Pretty!" Dorothy screamed, "Pretty! Nay, aunt, you cannot call that baby-faced chit pretty. No air; no breeding; mere dairymaid's beauty. It makes me laugh to think how proud she was of her fine gown and cap, which only showed her awkward gait the more." And Mistress Dorothy fingered her Flemish lace and the string of beads round her short, thick neck, with profound belief in her own charms.

If Lucy's beauty was that of a milkmaid, Dorothy's was decidedly of a different character. Her complexion was sallow and pale; her hair, which was by no means abundant, was of the sandy hue, which she tried to persuade herself was like the Queen's. Her eyes were of a greenish colour, and deeply set under a heavy forehead, and her figure was angular and ungraceful.

Fine feathers do not always make a fine bird, and Dorothy Ratcliffe, although with what in those days was considered to be a fortune at her back, did not find

fervent suitors for her favour. She was, therefore, very ready to fall in with Mistress Ratcliffe's wishes, and take pains to ingratiate herself with George, failing Humphrey, whose position as one of Mr. Sidney's esquires, made him the more desirable of the two brothers.

Dorothy Ratcliffe was the child of George's uncle, who was a recluse living at Tunbridge. He was a scholar and a pedant, and concerned himself but little about his only child, whose fortune was inherited from her mother.

Marriages in those days were generally settled for the people principally concerned, with or without their consent, as it happened, and Master Ratcliffe and George's mother had a sort of tacit understanding with each other that Dorothy should take herself and her fortune to Hillbrow Place.

Dorothy was not unwilling to find herself mistress there, but she had always a lingering hope that Humphrey would at last be a victim to her charms, and then it would be easy to throw George over.

But things did not look very promising, and Dorothy asked, in an irritable tone, before she parted with her aunt for the night,—

"Is Humphrey so taken up with the grand folk that he cannot find the time to pay his dutiful respects to you, aunt?"

"He was here late the last evening," Mistress Ratcliffe said, "and is, with George, anxious to furnish Mr. Sidney with the pick of the horses in the stable. Humphrey can scarce stir from Mr. Sidney."

"So it seems," Dorothy said. "Methinks, where

there's a will there's a way; but we shall have his company in London."

"Yes, and George's also. You will favour my poor boy's suit, Doll."

"Your poor boy! nay, aunt, he is not worthy of pity, when he wins favour from a peerless beauty like Mistress Forrester. But let be, it will not break my heart if he gives you this fair country maid for your daughter, who has not—so I have heard—so much as a brass farthing to call her own."

Deeply chagrined, and with an uneasy suspicion that Dorothy might be right in what she said, Mistress Ratcliffe left her niece to repose, saying to herself, "She has a tongue and a temper of her own, but we will soon tame her when we get her here."

CHAPTER IV.

THE HAWK AND THE BIRD.

"So doth the fox the lamb destroy we see,
The lion fierce, the beaver, roe or gray,
The hawk the fowl, the greater wrong the less,
The lofty proud the lowly poor oppress."

JOHN DAVIES, 1613.

WHEN George left Lucy at the door of Ford Place, she ran quickly through the kitchen, where Mistress Forrester was resting on the settle after the labours of the day.

Things had not gone well with the sick lambs, both were dead, and one of the cart-horses had gone lame, and the eggs of the pea-hen were addled.

These circumstances were not likely to sweeten Mistress Forrester's temper, and Lucy, who never bore malice, received a sharp answer in reply to her inquiries as to the condition of the lambs.

"They are dead, and much you care, flaunting off with your lover instead of turning your hand to help at home."

"I could not have saved the lambs' lives," Lucy said, "but I am sorry they are dead. I am sorry when any creature dies."

"I dare say! Be off to bed, for I am locking up in a minute."

"Where is Mary?" Lucy asked.

"A-bed. That boy has cut his little finger, or some such thing. Lor'! she was like to swoon with terror when she saw the blood; the child himself was not such a coward."

Lucy hastened upstairs, and found Mary by the window in her favourite seat. A book lay open on her knee, and, when Lucy came in, she held up her hand, and, pointing to the bed, said,—

"Hush! he is asleep."

"What has happened?" Lucy said. "Is the boy hurt?"

"He cut his hand with an old knife, and the blood poured forth. Oh, Lucy, if aught were to befall him, I scarce dare think of what would become of me."

Lucy thought of the strange encounter she had had with the man on the hill path, and wondered whether it were kind to raise her sister's fears about Ambrose.

"Come and sit by me, sweetheart," Mary said, making room for her sister on the deep window seat.

"I am troubled to-night with a shadow of coming grief. Sure I have had enough, and I am young yet. Twenty-five is young, though I dare to say I seem old to you, little sister. I am perplexed in mind, and tossed about with doubt. Can you think of me as a merry, light-hearted maiden, donning my smartest gown to go at Lady Mary's bidding to the Park, where great festivities were held in honour of the Queen's visit? Ah, child, it was then soft words and flattery turned my head, and I—well, I have rued it to this hour. Thus, dear Lucy, when I think of your going forth in my Lady Pembroke's train, I fear for you. I will pray also, and pray God may watch over you."

"Then I may go," Lucy said. "I may really go. Oh, Mary, Mary, I am so happy!"

Then, remembering her encounter with the stranger she said,—

"I met a man on the hill path as I went to Hillbrow. He scared me a little bit, but George Ratcliffe came up, and he made off and like a ghost vanished."

"A man!" Mary exclaimed, in a low voice of suppressed fear. "What man?"

"He was clad in a long cloak, with a cap pulled over his brow. He had evil eyes—dark, piercing eyes."

Mary Gifford's clasp of her young sister tightened convulsively, and her heart throbbed so that Lucy could feel it as she pressed her closer and closer.

"What did he say to you, this strange man?"

"He said he would fain see little Ambrose, and bid me bring him to the stile where he met me, that he might look at him. He said he would call a curse

down on me if I refused. He looked dreadful as he spoke. And then George came. But, Mary—”

For Mary had sprung to her feet, and, with hands clasped and eyes dilated with terror, she stood like one struck down by some sudden blow.

“Promise, swear, Lucy, you will never take the child outside the fence on the hill side. Swear, Lucy.”

Lucy was frightened by her sister's vehemence, and said,—

“Yes, I promise. Oh, Mary, do not look like that. Do you know the man?”

“Know him! know him! Nay. How should I?” Then she said, after a pause, “Hush! we shall wake the boy. Let us talk no more to-night. Go to your bed, child; it is late, and to-morrow—yes, to-morrow is Sunday—I will go down with you to the church, and await my Lady Pembroke by the lych gate, and you shall have your desire, and God keep you, and bless you.”

Lucy quickly recovered her spirits; her heart was too full of delighted anticipation to have room for any prolonged fear about her sister, though her pale, terror-struck face, seen in the twilight, and her agonised appeal to her to swear what she asked, made her say, as she lay down on her low truckle bed in the little attic chamber next her sister's,—

“Sure Mary must know something of that man. Perhaps he was a boon companion of her wicked husband. Ah, me! it would be a different world if all men were brave and good and noble like—”

Before the name had taken shape on her lips, Lucy was asleep, and in her dreams there were no dark

strangers with cruel black eyes and sinister smiles, but goodly knights, in glistening armour, riding out against their adversaries, and goodlier and nobler than the rest, before whose lance all others fell, while the air rang with the shouts of victory, was Mr. Philip Sidney.

Sunday morning dawned fair and bright. The bells of Penshurst church were chiming for matins, when Mary Gifford, leading her boy by the hand, stood with Lucy under the elm tree by the timbered houses by the lych gate, returning the kindly greetings of many neighbours and acquaintances.

Overhead the great boughs of the elm tree were quivering in the soft breeze. The buds, scarcely yet unfolded into leaf, were veiled with tender green, while a sheaf of twigs on the trunk were clothed in emerald, in advance of the elder branches, and making the sombre bole alive with beauty, as the sunbeams sought them out, and cast their tiny, flickering shadows on the ground.

The village people always waited in the churchyard, or by the lych gate till the household from the castle came through the door leading from the Park to the church, and this morning their appearance was looked forward to with more than usual interest. Not only was Lady Mary expected, but the Countess of Pembroke and her ladies, with Mr. Sidney, and his young brothers, Robert and Thomas, were known to be of the party.

Sir Henry Sidney was seldom able to leave Ludlow for a peaceful sojourn in his beautiful home, and Lady Mary had sometimes to make the journey from Wales

without him, to see that all things in the house were well ordered, and to do her best to make the scanty income stretch out to meet the necessary claims upon it.

When two of the gentlemen in attendance came to the gate to hold it open for the ladies of the party to pass, the throng assembled in the churchyard moved up near the porch, and, as Lady Mary came in sight, curtseys from the women and reverences from the men testified to the esteem in which she was held.

Lady Pembroke came next, smiling and gracious. On her sweet face were no lines of the care which marked her mother's, and she looked what she was, a happy wife and mother.

By her side was Mr. Philip Sidney, closely followed by Robert and Thomas, who imitated his courteous bearing, and doffed their caps and bowed their heads in acknowledgment of their people's greeting.

The Sidneys were lords of Penshurst in every sense, and the loyalty of their tenants and dependants was unquestioned. It is not too much to say that Philip Sidney was regarded with admiration and respect, seldom equalled, by these simple people in the Kentish village, who felt a right in him, and a pride, which was perhaps sweeter to him than all the adulation he won in Elizabeth's Court.

When the Sidneys' large pew was filled with its occupants, the bell stopped, and the rest of the congregation hastened to fill the benches in the body of the church.

The service was conducted after the Anglican form of worship, but differed in some respects from that of the present day. The Puritans of those times were

making every effort to get rid of what, in their eyes, were useless forms and ceremonies, and in many places in England dissension was rife, and the dread of Popish innovations, or rather a return to Popish practices, was mingled with fierce hatred of Papists, and apprehension of their designs against the life of the Queen.

The Sidneys were staunch adherents of the reformed faith, and Philip Sidney was the staunchest of all. He could never forget the atrocities of that summer night in Paris, when the treachery of the king and his mother resulted in the massacre of innocent men and women, whose only crime was their devotion to the faith for which they died.

Philip Sidney had, as we know, protested with bold sincerity against the Queen's marriage with the Duke of Anjou, urging the danger to the Protestant cause in England, if the Queen should persist in her determination.

Now several years had passed, and he had regained Elizabeth's favour, and had withdrawn his opposition.

The French Ambassadors, who were to arrive in England in the following week, were to be entertained with grand feasts and games, in which he and his chief friend, Fulke Greville, were to take a leading part.

Perhaps no one in that congregation knew or dreamed that their ideal knight, as he stood up in his place amongst them, with his thoughtful face turned towards the nave of the church, had his heart filled with misgivings as to the part he had taken in this matter, and with still deeper misgivings as to the position in which he found himself with the only woman whom he loved and worshipped.

While the good clergyman was preaching a somewhat dull sermon from the words, "Fear God, honour the King," following the particular line acceptable in those days, by enforcing loyalty and devotion to the reigning sovereign as the whole duty of man, Philip, leaning back in his seat, his head thrown back, and that wistful, far-away look in his eyes, which enhanced their charm, was all unconscious of what was passing around him, so absorbed was he with his own thoughts.

He roused himself when the first words of a psalm were sung by the village choir in Sternhold and Hopkins' version, and bending over the book, which his sister Mary had opened, pointing her finger to the first line, he raised his musical voice and sang with her the rugged lines which called upon "All people that on earth do dwell, to sing to the Lord with cheerful voice."

Then the clergyman pronounced the blessing, and the congregation dispersed, the village people to their homes, the Sidneys towards the gate leading into the pleasance, which lay on the side of the house nearest to the church.

Mary Gifford held back, in spite of Lucy's entreaties to her to go forward.

"They will all have passed in, Mary," she exclaimed in an agony of excitement. "Were we not bidden to see the Countess by Mr. Sidney himself?"

But Mary was always modest and retiring, and she stood with Ambrose and her sister awaiting a summons.

It came at last. Humphrey Ratcliffe was at her side, saying—

"My Lady of Pembroke would fain speak with Lucy. Come forward with me."

As they followed Humphrey through the gateway in the wall, Lucy could scarcely conceal her agitation.

What should she say? What if Lady Pembroke thought her too young and too ignorant? She had pictured to herself that Mr. Sidney would himself have led her to his sister, but he was gone out of sight, and she heard one of the gentlemen say to Humphrey,—

"Sir Fulke Greville has arrived with a message from the Queen. Mr. Sidney has gone round to meet him."

"Ill news, I wonder?" Humphrey said.

"Nay, only some trifle about the tourney, belike a change in the colour of the armour, or some such folly."

Mary and her little son and Lucy were now standing at the end of the terrace walk of smooth turf, which is raised some feet above the wide pleasance below.

"Await the Countess's pleasure here," Humphrey said. "She is engaged in talk with Lady Mary, she will send to summon you when she sees fit."

The ladies and gentlemen in attendance on Lady Mary Sidney and her daughter were threading the narrow paths of the pleasance and chatting gaily with each other, the bright dresses of the ladies rivalling the colour of the spring flowers in the beds, while the jewelled hilts of the gentlemen's swords sparkled in the sunshine.

From the trees in the Park came the monotonous note of the unseen cuckoo, while the thrushes and blackbirds every now and then sent forth a burst of song, though it was nearly high noontide, when the

birds are often silent, as if, in the general rejoicing of the spring, all living things must take part.

The picturesque side of the home of the Sidneys, which faces this pleasance, was in shadow, and made a background to the gay scene, which accentuated the brilliant effect of the gay throng below it.

On the terrace Mary Gifford stood in her black garments, relieved by a long white veil, holding her impatient boy by the hand, while Lucy, no less impatient, was hoping every minute that she should receive a message from Lady Pembroke. The group at last caught the attention of Lady Mary, who had been in earnest conversation with her daughter.

"Ah! there is Mistress Gifford," she exclaimed, "and the little sister of whom Philip spoke as suitable to be one of our waiting-women. Let us hasten to speak with them. They have been, I fear, waiting too long."

"Yes; it was heedless of me to forget them; but there is the bell sounding for dinner in the hall, shall we not bid them sit down at the board? They must needs be weary after their long walk, and the service, to say naught of the sermon," Lady Pembroke added, laughing.

"Hush, then; I see the good minister coming towards us. He means well, and is a godly man."

"I do not doubt it, sweet mother; but let us mount the steps to the terrace, and show some courtesy to those waiting our pleasure there."

"They are coming towards us, Mary. Mary!" Lucy exclaimed, "come forward and meet them."

"Yes, mother," Ambrose said fretfully, dragging at his mother's hand. "I thought I was to see Mr. Sidney,

and that he would let me ride again. I am so weary and so hungry."

Lady Pembroke soon tripped up the stone steps, Lady Mary following more slowly. Lady Pembroke had all the graceful courtsey which distinguished her brother; and that high-bred manner which, quite apart from anything like patronage, always sets those who may be on a lower rung of the social ladder at ease in casual intercourse.

There are many who aspire to be thought "aristocratic" in their manners, and who may very successfully imitate the dress and surroundings of the old noblesse. But this gift, which showed so conspicuously in the family of the Sidneys, is an inheritance, and cannot be really copied. It is so easy to patronise from a lofty vantage ground, so difficult to make those below it feel that the distance is not thought of as an impassable gulf, but is bridged over by the true politeness which lies not on the surface, but has its root deep in the consideration for others, which finds expression in forgetfulness of self, and in remembering the feelings and tastes of those with whom we are brought in contact.

Like the mists of morning under the warm beams of the sun, Mary Gifford's restraint and shy reserve vanished when Lady Pembroke exclaimed,—

"Ah, here is the little knight that Philip told me of. See, mother, he must be a playfellow for your Thomas."

Lady Mary was somewhat breathless. She could not climb the steep, stone stairs as quickly as her daughter.

"Mistress Gifford must stay and dine with us, Mary, and then Thomas shall show him the pictures in the new book Philip has brought him from London."

"Are there pictures of horses and knights, madam?" Ambrose asked.

"They are Bible pictures, boy, but there are warriors amongst them, doubtless—Joshua and Samson, and, it may be, others."

The big bell which, to this day, is heard far and near at Penshurst, was still making its loud, sonorous clang, and Lady Mary, taking Ambrose by the hand led him along the terrace, his mother at the other side, and Lucy following with Lady Pembroke.

Instead of immediately beginning to discuss the probability of Lucy's being placed in her household, Lady Pembroke said,—

"I have not seen you for some time. You have grown apace since my marriage. Yet my brother, when he spoke of you, called you Mistress Gifford's little sister. You are taller than I am, methinks."

Lucy's face glowed with pleasure, as Lady Pembroke said this.

"And most like you have yet to grow a few inches."

"Nay, madam; I am near sixteen."

"And is sixteen too old to grow? I think not. It is the age to grow in wisdom as well as in stature."

"I would fain grow in the first, madam," Lucy said, "if only to please Mary, who is so good to me—my only friend."

"I forgot you have no mother, poor child."

"Nay, madam; only a cross-grained stepmother.

Mary bears her quips and cranks like a saint. I cannot do so."

"It is well to try to bear what you term quips and cranks. But we must repair to the hall now," Lady Pembroke said; and then, addressing a gentlewoman who was standing at the lower end of the long table, she said, "Mistress Crawley, be so good as to make room for Mistress Lucy Forrester at your side. She dines here to-day with Mistress Gifford."

Mary already had her place pointed out to her a little higher up the board with Ambrose; and the Countess of Pembroke, with a smile, said, as she passed to the gentleman who presided,—

"See that the young knight has sweet things enough to please his palate; and be sure, Master Pearson, that Mistress Gifford is well attended by the serving-men."

The family and principal guests sat at the upper end of the hall, and amongst them was Mr. Sidney's life-long friend, Sir Fulke Greville.

There was a few moments' silence, when the chaplain, raising his hand, said a Latin grace; and then there was a clatter of trenchers, and the quick passing to and fro of the serving-men, and the sound of many voices as the meal proceeded.

That hospitable board of the Sidneys was always well spread, and to-day, at the upper end, Lady Mary had provided the best of viands for the entertainment of her daughter, and of her favourite son and his friend.

Lady Mary's face was shining with motherly pride as she looked at Philip and her fair daughter, who

joined with keen delight in the conversation in which the two friends took the lead—her quick and ready appreciation of the subjects under discussion winning a smile from her brother, who continually referred to her, if on any point he and his friend held different opinions. Indeed, the Countess of Pembroke was not far behind her brother in intellectual gifts. The French and Italian literature, in which he delighted, were familiar to her also; and the *Divina Commedia* and the *Vita Nuova* were, we may well believe, amongst her favourite works. The great Poet of the Unseen must have had an especial charm for the lovers of literature in those times of awakening.

The mystic and allegorical style, the quaint and grotesque imagery in which Dante delighted, must have touched an answering chord in the hearts of scholars like Philip Sidney and the Countess of Pembroke.

That Philip Sidney was deeply versed in the story of Beatrice—following her with devout admiration, as her lover showed her in her girlish beauty, and then in her matured and gracious womanhood—we may safely conclude.

At the time of which we write, he was making a gallant fight against defeat, in the struggle between love and duty, striving to keep the absorbing passion for his Stella within the bounds which the laws of honour and chivalry demanded, at whatever cost. No one can read the later stanzas, which are amongst the most beautiful in *Stella and Astrophel*, without feeling that, deep as was his love, his sense of honour was deeper still.

Nor is it unreasonable to feel that, as he followed the great Master through those mysterious realms, guided by the lady of his love, pure and free from the fetters of earthly passion, Philip Sidney would long with unutterable longing that his love might be also as wings to bear him heavenward, like that of Dante for his Beatrice, whose name is for all time immortal like his own.

When the grace was said, the company at the upper end of the great hall rose, and left it by the staircase which led to the private apartments of the spacious house.

The ladies passed out first, and the Countess of Pembroke, turning at the foot of the stairs, said,—

“Mistress Crawley, bid Lucy Forrester to follow us with Mistress Gifford and the boy.”

But Lucy was thinking more of Mr. Philip Sidney than of her summons to attend his sister. She was hoping for a smile from him, and felt a thrill of disappointment as he put his arm through Sir Fulke Greville’s and turned away to the principal entrance with his friend.

Lucy’s eyes followed them, and she was roused from her dream by a sharp tap on her shoulder.

“Did you not hear my lady’s order, child? Methinks you will need to mend your manners if you wish to enter her service.”

Lucy’s face grew crimson, and she gave Mistress Crawley a look, which, if she had dared, she would have accompanied by a saucy word.

Mary Gifford, who was waiting for her sister, said gently,—

"We are to follow quickly, hasten, Lucy, Mistress Crawley is waiting."

Lucy tossed her head and did not hurry herself even then. She had many admirers in the neighbourhood besides George Ratcliffe, and one of them said to him,—

"It is a shame if old Mother Crawley has that little beauty as her servant. She will trample on her and make her life a burden to her, or I am mistaken."

George resented any interference about Lucy from another man, and he greatly objected to hear her called "a little beauty;" for George's love for her was that of a respectful worshipper at the shrine of a divinity, and he could not brook anything like familiar disrespect in others.

"Mistress Forrester," he said, "is likely to win favour wherever she may go, and she will serve the Countess of Pembroke rather than Mistress Crawley."

A provoking laugh was the answer to this.

"You can know naught of the life of a household like my Lady Pembroke's. The head waiting-woman is supreme, and the underlings are her slaves. They may sit and stitch tapestry till they are half blind, and stoop over the lace pillow till they grow crooked, for all my lady knows about it. Ask Mistress Betty here, she knows what a life Mistress Crawley can lead her slaves."

The person addressed as Mistress Betty was beginning to answer, when George turned away to go to the stables, where he thought Mr. Sidney had probably preceded him with Sir Fulke Greville, to examine the points of the two fresh steeds he had purchased for the

tournament. But he could see nothing of Mr. Sidney, and, meeting his brother Humphrey, he heard from him that he had walked away down the avenue with Sir Fulke Greville, apparently in earnest conversation, and that they would not care to be disturbed.

George lingered about disconsolately, and at last left the Park and went towards the river, which he knew Mary Gifford and Lucy must cross on their homeward way. At least he would have the chance of mounting guard over Lucy, and be present if the man who had so lightly spoken of her should be so presumptuous as to follow her.

After long waiting, George saw Lucy and her sister and Ambrose coming out of the gateway leading from the Park, and he was well satisfied to see that his brother Humphrey, and no other squire, was in attendance.

Ambrose was tired and a little querulous, and dragged heavily at his mother's hand. Humphrey offered to carry the boy, but he resented that as an indignity, and murmured that he had not seen Mr. Sidney, and he wanted to ride his horse again.

"Mr. Sidney has other matters on hand than to look after a tired, cross boy," his mother said. "Come, my son, quicken your pace somewhat, or we shall not be at home for supper. It was a grand treat for you to be entertained by my Lady Mary's sons, and you should be in high good humour," she continued.

But poor little Ambrose kept up the same murmured discontent, of which the burden was,—

"I want to ride on Mr. Sidney's horse," and he dragged back more persistently than ever, till his

mother's fair face flushed with the exertion of pulling him up the steep hill, over which the low westering sun was casting a glow, which was hot for the time of year.

Humphrey at last settled the matter by lifting Ambrose, in spite of his struggles, upon his shoulders, and saying,—

“You will never be a true knight, boy, like Mr. Sidney, if you growl and scold at trifles. Fie, for shame, see how weary you have made your mother.”

“I don't love you,” the child said, “and I hate to be carried like a babe.”

“Then do not behave as a babe,” Mary said, “but thank Master Humphrey for his patience and for sparing you the climb uphill. If you love me, Ambrose, be amenable and good.”

The appeal had its effect. The child sat quietly on his perch on Humphrey's broad shoulder, and soon forgot his vexation in watching the rapid evolutions of a hawk in chase of a flight of small birds, one of which at last was made its prey.

“See, see, mother; hark, that is the cry of the little bird, the hawk has got it.”

Mary Gifford stopped, and, looking up, saw the hawk in full swing, not many hundred yards distant, with the bird in its beak, fluttering and struggling in vain.

“Ah!” she said, with a shudder, “the weak is ever the prey of the strong, Master Humphrey,” and then she stopped.

He looked down on her troubled face with intense sympathy.

"Master Humphrey, the Countess of Pembroke and Lady Mary said they would fain make my boy a page in attendance. Oh! I cannot, I dare not part with him, he is my all—my all."

"Nor shall you part from him," Humphrey said. "No one could wish to force you to do so."

"No one—no one; but if a trap were laid, if a net were spread, if a ruthless hawk pursues a defenceless bird, the end is gained at last!"

Humphrey could not follow her meaning, and he said,—

"I do not understand. What do you fear?"

"Oh! what do I fear? Perchance if you had an idol, you would think of the words of Holy Scripture, that such should be utterly abolished, but," she continued, changing her tone and speaking cheerfully, "see how Lucy lags behind, poor child! Methinks her heart misgives her as the parting is now certain. She is to enter on her duties when the Countess goes to London with Lady Mary Sidney, one day in this week. May God keep her safe. You will be about the Court with Mr. Sidney, and you will keep a watch over her. I know you will."

"Yes, as you know full well, I will serve you in that or in any way, nor ask for my guerdon till such time as you may see good to grant it to me, your friend always, Mistress Gifford, your lover, your humble suitor, when—"

"Hush," she said, laying her hand on his arm, "such words may not pass between you and me. Did I not tell you, did I not warn you that so it must be. And now, my little son," she continued, "get down

from your high perch, if Master Humphrey is so good as to put you on your feet, for we are nearly at home."

Ambrose, as soon as his feet touched the ground, ran off at full speed, and, turning into the lane, was hidden from sight for a few moments. It was scarcely more, but his mother rushed after him, calling him by name to stop.

But the child was a swift runner, and Mary, putting her hands to her side, said,—

"Master Ratcliffe, pursue him. Don't let him run out of sight, I—I cannot follow."

It needed only a few of Humphrey Ratcliffe's long, quick strides to overtake Ambrose, and seize him by the arm.

"What a plague you are to your mother, child; first you can't walk, and then you run off like a young colt."

"There was a black man in the hedge yonder that made me run so fast."

"A black man! away with such folly. The black man is the stump of that old tree covered with ivy, so you are a coward, after all."

Mary had come up now, breathless.

"Ambrose, Ambrose, why did you run like that?"

"I saw a black man," the child repeated, "and I wanted to get to the gate."

Mary said not a word, but, taking the boy's hand, held it fast, and went towards the house.

CHAPTER V.

RESISTANCE.

“God giveth heavenly grace unto such as call unto Him with outstretched hands and humble heart; never wanting to those that want not to themselves.”—SIR T. WILSON, 1554.

THE two brothers, Humphrey and George Ratcliffe, left Mary Gifford and Lucy at the gate of Ford Place.

From a barn came the sound of voices singing a psalm, in not very musical tones.

Mistress Forrester was engaging in a Puritan service with a few of the chosen ones, who would not join in what they deemed the Popish ceremonies of the church in the valley. These stern dissenters from the reformed religion were keeping alive that spark which, fanned into a flame some fifty years later, was to sweep through the land and devastate churches, and destroy every outward sign in crucifix, and pictured saint in fair carved niche, and image of seer or king, which were in their eyes the token of that Babylon which was answerable for the blood of the faithful witnesses for Christ!

The stern creed of the followers of Calvin had a charm for natures like Mistress Forrester, who, secure in her own salvation, could afford to look down on those outside the groove in which she walked; and

with neither imagination nor any love of the beautiful, she felt a gruesome satisfaction in what was ugly in her own dress and appearance, and a contempt for others who had eyes to see the beauty to which she was blind.

Lucy had come home in a very captious mood, and declaring she was weary and had a pain in her head; she said she needed no supper, and went up to her little attic chamber in the roof of the house.

Mary Gifford laid aside her long veil, and made a bowl of milk and brown bread ready for her boy; and then, while he ate it, pausing between every spoonful to ask his mother some question, she prepared the board for the guests, whom she knew her stepmother would probably bring in from the barn when the long prayer was over.

Ambrose was always full of inquiries on many subjects, and this evening he had much to say about the picture-book Master Tom Sidney showed him—the man in the lions' den, and why they did not eat him up; the men in a big fire that were not burned, because God kept them safe. And then he returned to the hawk and the little bird, and wondered how many more the cruel hawk had eaten for his supper; and, finally, wished God would take care of the little birds, and let the hawk live on mice like the old white owl in the barn. The child's prattle was not heeded as much as sometimes, and Mary's answers were not so satisfactory as usual. He was like his Aunt Lucy, tired, and scarcely as much pleased with his day as he had expected to be; and, finally, his mother carried him off to bed, and, having folded his hands, made him re-

peat a little prayer, and then he murmured out in a sing-song a verse Ned the cowboy had taught him:—

Four corners to my bed
Four angels at my head;
Matthew, Mark, Luke and John,
Bless the bed I lie upon.

Almost before the last word was said, the white lids closed over the violet eyes, and Ambrose was asleep. Mary stood over him for a minute with clasped hands.

“Ah! God keep him safe, nor suffer him to stray where danger lurks,” she said.

Voices below and the sound of heavy feet warned her that the meeting in the barn was over, and her stepmother would require her presence.

The little company which had met in the barn was composed of labourers and shepherds, with one or two of the better sort of work-people holding superior positions on the estate of the Sidneys.

Mistress Forrester asked a tall man with a very nasal twang to bless the humble fare set before them, and a very long prayer followed before the benches were drawn closer to the board, and the large bowls of bread and milk, favoured with strips of onion, were attacked by the hungry brethren with large, unwieldy, wooden spoons.

Mary waited on the guests, and, filling a large earthen cup with cider, passed it round. One man who took a very prolonged pull at it, wiping his mouth with the flap of his short homespun cloak, said, in a mysterious whisper,—

“There’s a nest of Papists hiding in Tunbridge, and

one of those emissaries of the Evil One is lurking about here, Mistress Forrester. Let us all be on guard."

"Ay," said another, "I've seen him. He wears the priest's garb, and he is plotting mischief. What can he want here?"

"He can work us no harm; the tables are turned now, and the Papists are getting their deserts," Mistress Forrester said.

"I wouldn't trust them," said the first speaker. "They would as lief set fire to this house or yon barn as to a stake where the blessed martyrs were bound. You looked scared, Mistress Gifford. But, if all we hear is true, you rather favour the Papists."

Mary rallied, with a great effort.

"Nay," she said; "I do not favour their creed or their persecuting ways, but I may no less feel pain that they should be hunted, and, as I know, in many cases, homeless and dying of hunger."

"Mary consorts with grand folks down at the great house," Mistress Forrester said, "who look with as little favour on us, or less, than on the Papists. For my part, I see but small difference between the bowings, and scrapings and mummeries practised in the church down yonder, and the mass in the Papists' worship."

"You are near right, Mistress Forrester; and those who are aiding and abetting the Queen in her marriage with a Popish prince have much to answer for."

"Which Popish prince?" asked one of the more ignorant of the assembly.

"Is not the man, Philip Sidney, who is set up in these parts as a god, getting ready to take a share in

the tourney which is to do honour to the men sent by the brother of the murderous French king?"

"I never heard tell on't," gasped an old dame. "Dear heart! what will the country come to?"

"*Ruin!*" was the answer. "And tell me not a man is godly who has ordered the Maypole to be set up this coming first of May, and gives countenance by his presence on the Sabbath day to the wrestling games of the village louts, and the playing of bowls in the green at the back of the hostelry. But let us praise the Lord we are delivered from the bondage of Satan, and have neither part nor lot in these evil doings and vain sports, working days or Sabbath!"

Fervent Amens were uttered, and, wrapt in the mantle of self-satisfaction that they were not as other men, the company gathered in the kitchen of Ford Manor broke up, and, in the gathering twilight, dispersed to their homes.

Mary Gifford hastened to put away the remnants of the supper, and reserved the broken fragments for the early breakfast of the poultry the next morning.

Mistress Forrester did not seem inclined for conversation, and yawned audibly, saying she was tired out and it was time to lock up for the night.

"The days are lengthening now," Mary said. "I do not feel inclined for bed. Leave me, mother, to make all safe."

"As you will," was the reply. "I'll hear what you have to say about Lucy to-morrow. Jabez Coleman says we are sending her to the jaws of the lion by this move, and that she will never return, or like you——"

"Spare me, mother!" Mary said. "I cannot bear much more to-night."

"Much more! Sure, Mary, you make an ado about nothing. What have you to bear, I'd like to know, with a roof over your head, and your child fed and clothed? Bear indeed!" and with a low, mocking laugh, Mistress Forrester stumped with her heavy tread up the stairs which led to the upper floor from the further end of the kitchen.

Mary went into the porch, and the peaceful landscape before her seemed to quiet her troubled spirit. She was so keenly alive to all that was beautiful in nature; her education had been imperfect, but she was open to receive all impressions, and, during her short married life, she had been brought into contact with the people who were attached to the Earl of Leicester's household, and had read books which had quickened her poetic taste and given a colour to her life.

It is difficult for those who live in these times to realise the fervour with which the few books then brought within the reach of the people were received by those who were hungry for self-culture. The Queen was an accomplished scholar, and did her best to encourage the spread of literature in the country. But though the tide had set in with an ever-increasing flow, the flood had not as yet reached the women in Mary Forrester's position. Thus, when she married Ambrose Gifford, a new world was opened to her by such books as Surrey's *Translation of the Æneid*, and Painter's *Tales from Boccaccio*. She had an excellent memory, and had learned by heart Wyatt's *Translation of the Psalms*, and many parts of Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*.

This evening she took from the folds of her gown a small book in a brown cover, which had been a gift to her that very day from Mary, Countess of Pembroke.

It was the Psalms in English verse, which the brother and sister had produced together in the preceding year when Philip Sidney, weary of the Court, and burdened with the weight of his love for Stella, had soothed his spirit by this joint work with his sister as they walked together in the wide domain of Wilton, the home to which Mary Sidney went from her native Penshurst, and which was scarcely less fair and beautiful than that which she left to become the wife of the Earl of Pembroke.

It was at Wilton that *The Arcadia* had its birth, and the description of the fair country where Sir Philip Sidney and his sister placed the heroes and heroines of the story may well answer as a description of both places, as they write of proud heights, garnished with stately trees; and humble valleys comforted with the refreshing of silver rivers; the meadows enamelled with all sorts of flowers; the fields garnished with roses, which made the earth blush as bashful at its own beauty—with other imagery which, after the lapse of more than three hundred years, shines out through the tangled labyrinth of the story of *The Arcadia*, like golden threads, the lustre of which time has no power to dim.

Mary Gifford has paid dearly for those five years spent in the world, which was so far removed from the peace and seclusion of her native hills. And now, as she sits in the porch, and opening the little book which had been the gift that day from the Countess of Pembroke, she tried, in the dim waning light, to read

some verses from the thick page, which the lines printed close in black letters made somewhat difficult. Presently the book fell from her hand and she started to her feet, as there was a rustle near and a soft tread of stealthy footsteps.

In another moment the tall black figure Lucy had spoken of stood before her.

Her heart beat fast, and it needed all her courage not to cry aloud with fear.

"What is your pleasure, sir?" she said.

The slouching hat was removed, and she saw before her her husband,—

"You thought I was dead; is it not so? I crave your pardon for being alive, Mary."

"I heard a rumour that you lived," she replied; "but why do you come hither to torture me?"

"I have an errand, and I shall fulfil it. I am come hither for my son."

"You come, then, on a bootless errand," was the answer. "No power in Heaven and earth will make me surrender my child to your tender mercies."

"We shall see," was the cool reply. "Hearken, Mary! I left the country after that fray with the man you know of. They left me for dead, but I rose and escaped. The man lay dead—that consoles me—his wife—"

"Do not go over the miserable wickedness of your life. You were covered with dishonour, and you betrayed me. I would die sooner than give up my child to you; you shall kill me first—"

"Nay, Mary, do not give vent to your hatred and abhorrence of me. Hearken! I know I was a sinner,

not worse than thousands, but I have sought the shelter of the Holy Catholic Church, and I am absolved from my sins by penance and fasting. The unhappy woman for whom I sinned is now a professed nun in a convent. I shall never look on her face again. I have joined the priests at Douay; one Dr. Allan has the control of the school. It is there I will take my son, and have him brought up in the Catholic faith."

"Never!" Mary said. "My son shall be trained in the Protestant faith, and I will hold him, by God's grace, safe from your evil designs. Ah, Ambrose, be not so pitiless; be merciful."

"Pitiless! nay, it is you who are pitiless. You scout my penitence; you scorn and spurn me, and you ask me, forsooth, to be merciful. I give you your choice—commit the boy to my care within one week, or I will find means to take him whether you will or no. I give you fair warning."

"You have robbed me of peace and love, and all a woman counts dear. You betrayed me and deserted me; you slew the husband of the woman you ruined, and fled the country with her. The sole comfort left me is my boy, and I will keep him, God helping me. I will not put his soul in jeopardy by committing him to a father unworthy the name."

Could this be gentle Mary Gifford? This woman with flashing eyes and set, determined face, from which all tenderness seemed to have vanished as she stood before the man from whom she had suffered a terrible wrong, and who was the father of her child.

The mother, roused in defence of her boy—from what she considered danger both to his body and soul

—was, indeed, a different woman from the quiet, dignified matron, who had stood in that very spot with Humphrey Ratcliffe a day or two before, and had turned away with sorrowful resolution from the love he offered her, and which she could not accept.

What if it had been possible for her to take refuge with him! What if she had been, as for years everyone believed her to be, a widow! Now disgraced, and with the death of the man, whom he had killed on his head, and as one of the hunted and persecuted Papists, her husband lived! If only he had died.

The next moment the very thought was dismissed, with a prayer for grace to resist temptation, and pardon even for the thought, and Mary Gifford was her true self again.

With the fading light of the April evening on her face—pale as death, but no longer resentful—her heart no longer filled with passionate anger and shrinking from the husband who had so cruelly deserted her, she stood before him, quiet and self-possessed, awakening in his worldly and deceitful heart admiration, and even awe.

There was silence between them for a short space.

Suddenly, from the open casement above their heads, came the sound of the child's voice—a low murmur at first, then growing louder—as the dream passed into reality.

“Mother, mother! Ambrose wants mother!”

Then, without another word, Mary Gifford bowed her head, and, passing into the kitchen, closed and barred the door; and, hastening to her room, threw herself on her knees by the child's little bed, crying,—

"Ambrose, sweetheart! Mother is here!

"I'm glad on't," said the child, in a sleepy, dreamy voice, as he turned towards her, and wound his arms round her neck.

"I'm glad on't! I thought I had lost her."

The sound of the child's voice smote on the ears of the unhappy father, and sent a sharp thrill of pain through his heart.

Perhaps there never was a moment in his life when he felt so utterly ashamed and miserable.

He felt the great gulf which lay between him and the pure woman whom he had so cruelly deserted—a gulf, too, separating him from the child in his innocent childhood—the possession of whom he so greatly coveted. For a moment or two softer feelings got the mastery, and Ambrose Gifford stood there, under the starlit sky, almost resolved to relinquish his purpose, and leave the boy to his mother. But that better feeling soon passed, and the specious reasoning, that he was doing the best for the child to have him brought up a good Catholic, and educated as his mother could never educate him, and that the end justified the means, and that he was bound to carry out his purpose, made him say to himself, as he turned away,—

"I will do it yet, in spite of her, for the boy's salvation. Yes; by the saints I will do it!"

The next few days passed without any summons for Lucy to join the household at Penshurst.

She became restless and uneasy, fearing that, after all, she might miss what she had set her heart upon.

Troubles, too, arose about her dress. She had been

conscious on Sunday that the ladies in attendance were far smarter than she was; and she had overheard the maiden, who was addressed as "Betty," say,—

"That country child is vain of her gown, but it might have been put together in the reign of our Queen's grandmother. And who ever saw a ruff that shape; it is just half as thick as it ought to be."

Poor little Lucy had other causes, as she thought, for discontent. The long delay in the fulfilment of her wishes was almost too much for her patience; but it was exasperating, one morning, to be summoned from the dairy by little Ambrose to see a grand lady on a white horse, who asked if Mistress Lucy Ratcliffe had gone to London.

Lucy ran out in eager haste, hoping almost against hope that it was some lady from Penshurst, sent by the Countess to make the final arrangements.

To her dismay she found Dorothy Ratcliffe being lifted from the pillion by a serving-man, attired in a smart riding-robe of crimson with gold buttons and a hood of the same material to protect her head from the sun and the keen east wind which had set in during the last few days.

"Good-day to you," Dorothy said. "I did not hope to find you here. Methought you had set off for London days ago! Whence the delay?"

"I am waiting the Countess of Pembroke's pleasure," Lucy said, with heightened colour. "The tourney has been put off."

"As we all know," Dorothy remarked, "but it is well to be lodged in good time, for all the quarters near Whitehall will be full to overflowing. Prithee, let me

come in out of the wind, it is enow to blow one's head off one's shoulders."

Lucy was unpleasantly conscious that she was in her ordinary dress, that her blue homespun was old and faded, that her sleeves were tucked up, and that there was neither ruff at her throat nor ruffles at her sleeves, that her somewhat disordered locks were covered with a thick linen cap, while Mistress Ratcliffe was smartly equipped for riding after the fashion of the ladies of the time.

"Well-a-day," Dorothy said. "I am vexed you are disappointed. We are off at sunrise on the morrow, staying a night at my father's house in Tunbridge, and then on to London on the next day but one. Aunt Ratcliffe and my father have business to go through about me and my jointure, for, after all, for peace's sake, I shall have to wed with George, unless," with a toss of her head, "I choose another suitor in London."

Dorothy's small eyes were fastened on Lucy as she spoke. If she hoped the information she had given would be unwelcome, she must have been disappointed. Lucy was herself again, and forgot her shabby gown and work-a-day attire, in the secret amusement she felt in Dorothy's way of telling her proposed marriage with George Ratcliffe.

"It will save all further plague of suitors," Dorothy continued, "and there is nought against George. If he is somewhat of a boor in manners, I can cure him, and, come what may, I dare to say he will be a better husband in the long run than Humphrey. What do you say, Mistress Lucy?"

"I dare to say both are good men and trusty," was

the answer, "and both are well thought of by everyone."

"Ay, so I believe; but now tell me how comes it you are left out in the cold like this? I vow I did my best to wheedle the old aunt yonder to let you come in our train, but she is as hard as a rock when she chooses. When I get to Hillbrow there won't be two mistresses, I warrant. One of us will have to give in, and it won't be your humble servant! As I say I am sorry you have lost your chance of this jaunt. It's a pity, and if I could put in a good word for you I would. I am on my way now to Penshurst Place to pay my dutiful respects to my Lady Mary Sidney. My good aunt was not ready when I started, so I thought to tarry here to await her coming. I hear the horse's feet, I think, in the lane. I must not make her as cross as two sticks by keeping her fuming at my delay, so good-day, Mistress Lucy. I am mightily sorry for you, but I will put in a word for you if I can."

"I pray you not to mention my name, Mistress Dorothy," Lucy said. "You are quite wrong, I am only waiting for my summons from the Countess, and I am prepared to start."

"Not if the summons came now," Dorothy said, with a disagreeable smile. "You couldn't ride to Court in homespun, methinks. Her Highness the Queen, so I hear, is vastly choice about dress, and she has proclaimed that if the ruffs either of squires or ladies are above a certain height they shall be clipped down by shearers hired for the purpose—willy nilly. As you have no ruffs, it seems, this order will not touch your comfort. Good-day."

Lucy looked after her departing visitor, seated on a pillion with the serving-man, with a scornful smile.

It was irritating, no doubt, to be pitied by Dorothy Ratcliffe, and to have to stand by her in such humble attire, but did she not know that George, poor George, loved her, and her alone; did she not know that he would never suffer himself to be entrapped into a marriage with his cousin, even though she had bags of gold, and finally—and that was perhaps the sweetest thought of all—did she not know whether in faded homespun, guiltless of lace or ruffle, or in her best array, no one could look twice at Dorothy Ratcliffe while she was by.

So the poor little vain heart was comforted, as Lucy turned to Mary, who had been in the bake-house kneading flour for the coarse, brown bread consumed by the household at Ford Manor far too quickly to please Mistress Forrester, with a merry laugh,—

“To think on’t, Mary. Doll Ratcliffe has been visiting me to tell me she is to marry George, and be the fair mistress of Hillbrow. I could split my sides with laughing to think of it! And she came to pity me—pity me, forsooth! because I have to wait long for the summons to join my Lady Pembroke, and she starts on the morrow. I hate pity, Mary;—pity, indeed, from a frump like that! I can snap my fingers at her, and tell her she will want my pity—not I hers.”

“Go and finish your work, Lucy,” Mary said. “Strive after a gentler and more patient spirit. It fills me with foreboding when you give your tongue such licence.”

“Mary!” Lucy said, with a sudden vehemence.

"Mary! I heard you sobbing last night—I know I did. I heard you praying for help. Oh! Mary, I love you—I love you, and I would fain know why you are more unhappy than you were a while ago. Has it aught to do with that black, dreadful man I saw on the hill?"

"Do not speak of him—not a soul must know of him. Promise, Lucy!" Mary said.

"But George Ratcliffe knows how he scared me that day, though he did not see him. He said he would track him out and belabour him as he deserved."

And now, before Mary could make any rejoinder, Ambrose was calling from the head of the stairs,—

"Mother, I am tired of staying here, let me come down."

"Yes, come, Ambrose," Mary said, "mother's work is over, and she can have you now near her."

The child was the next minute in his mother's arms. Mary covered him with kisses.

"And you have stayed in my chamber for these two hours?" she said. "My good, brave boy!"

"Yes; I stayed," the child said, "because I promised, you know. I didn't like it—and when a lady rode up on a big grey horse, I did begin to run down, and then I stopped and went back to the lattice, and only looked at her. It was not a horse like Mr. Sidney's, and I should not care to ride on a pillion—I like to sit square, like Mr. Sidney does. When will he come again? If he comes, will you tell him I am learning to be a dutiful boy? He told me to be a dutiful boy, because I had no father; and I *will* be dutiful and take care of you, sweet mother!"

"Ah, Ambrose! Ambrose!" Mary said, "you are my joy and pride, when you are good and obedient, and we will take care of each other, sweetheart, and never part—"

"Not till I am a big man," Ambrose said, doubtfully, "not till I am a big man, then—"

"We will not speak of that day yet—it is so far off. Now we must set the board for dinner, and you shall help me to do it, for it is near eleven o'clock."

CHAPTER VI.

THREE FRIENDS.

“To lose good days that might be better spent,
To waste long nights in pensive discontent,
To speed to-day—to be put back to-morrow—
To feed on hope—and pine with fear and sorrow.”

SPENSER.

THE gentlewomen in attendance on the Queen had a sorry time of it during Philip Sidney's absence from the Court.

She was irritable and dissatisfied with herself and everyone besides. Fearing lest the French Ambassador should not be received with due pomp in London, and sending for Lord Burleigh and the Earl of Leicester again and again to amend the marriage contract which was to be discussed with the Duke of Anjou's delegates.

Secret misgivings were doubtless the reason of the Queen's uneasy mood, and she vented her ill-humour upon her tire-women, boxing their ears if they failed to please her in the erection of her head-gear, or did not arrange the stiff folds of her gold-embroidered brocade over the hoop, to her entire satisfaction.

Messengers were despatched several times during the process of the Queen's toilette on this May morning to inquire if Mr. Philip Sidney had returned from Penshurst.

"Not returned yet!" she exclaimed, "nor Fulke Greville with him. What keeps them against my will? I will make 'em both rue their conduct."

"Methinks, Madam," one of the ladies ventured to say, "Mr. Philip Sidney is wholly given up to the effort he is making that the coming tourney may be as brilliant as the occasion demands, and that keeps him away from Court."

"A likely matter! You are a little fool, and had best hold your tongue if you can say nought more to the purpose."

"I know Mr. Sidney spares no pains to the end he has in view, Madam, and he desires to get finer horses for his retinue."

"You think you are in his confidence, then," the Queen said, angrily. "You are a greater fool than I thought you. I warrant you think Philip Sidney is in love with you—you are in love with him, as the whole pack of you are, I doubt not, and so much the worse for you."

Then the Queen having, by this sally, brought the hot tears to the lady's eyes, recovered her composure and her temper, and proceeded to take her morning draught of spiced wine, with sweet biscuits, and then resorted to the Council chamber, where all matters of the State were brought before her by her ministers. Here Elizabeth was the really wise and able monarch, who earnestly desired the good of her people; here her counsellors were often fairly amazed at her far-seeing intelligence and her wide culture. No contrast could be greater than between the middle-aged Maiden Queen pluming her feathers to win the hearts of her courtiers,

and listening with satisfaction to the broadest flattery with which they could approach her, and the sovereign of a nation in times which must ever stand out in the history of England as the most remarkable the country has ever known, gravely deliberating with such men as Lord Burleigh and Sir Francis Walsingham on the affairs of State at home and abroad.

Elizabeth had scarcely seated herself in her chair, and was about to summon Sir Francis Walsingham, when one of the pages-in-waiting came in, and, bending his knee, said,—

“Mr. Philip Sidney craves an audience with your Highness.”

Philip was only waiting in the ante-chamber to be announced, and, being secure of his welcome, had followed the page into the Queen’s presence, and, before Elizabeth had time to speak, he was on his knees before her, kissing the hand she held out to him.

“Nay, Philip, I scarce know whether I will receive you—a truant should be whipped as a punishment—but, mayhap, this will do as well for the nonce,” and the Queen stroked Philip Sidney on both cheeks, saying, “The gem of my Court, how has it fared with him?”

“As well as with any man while absent from you, fair Queen. Gems,” he added playfully, “do not shine in the dark, they need the sun to call forth their brightness, and you are my sun; apart from you, how can I shine?”

“A pretty conceit,” Elizabeth said. “But tell me, Philip, are things put in train for the due observance

of such an event as the coming of the delegates from France? It is a momentous occasion to all concerned."

"It is, indeed, Madam," Philip Sidney said, "and I pray it may result in happiness for you and this kingdom."

"Nay, now, Philip, are you going back to what you dared to say of disapproval of this marriage three years ago? I would fain hope not, for your own sake."

"Madam, I then, in all humility, delivered to you my sentiments. You were not pleased to hear them, and I was so miserable as to offend you."

"Yes, and," using her favourite oath "you will again offend me if you revive the old protest, so have a care. We exercise our royal prerogative in the matter of marriage, and I purpose to wed with the Duke of Anjou, come what may."

"I know it, Madam, and, as your faithful subject, I am doing my utmost to make the coming jousts worthy of your approval and worthy of the occasion. The Fortress of Beauty is erected, and the mound raised, and I would fain hope that you will be pleased to honour the victors with a smile."

"And with something more valuable; but tell me, Philip, how does it fare with my Lady Rich? Rumour is busy, and there are tale-bearers, who have neither clean hearts nor clean tongues. Sure you can pick and choose amongst many ladies dying for your favour; sure your Queen may lay claim to your devotion. Why waste your sighs on the wife of Lord Rich?"

Immediately Philip Sidney's manner changed. Not even from the Queen could he bear to have this sore

wound touched. He rose from his half-kneeling, half-sitting position at the Queen's feet, and said in a grave voice,—

"I await your commands, Madam, which I shall hold sacred to my latest breath, but pardon me if I beseech your Highness to refrain from the mention of one whom I have lost by my own blind folly, and so made shipwreck."

"Tut, tut, Philip; this is vain talking for my fine scholar and statesman. Shipwreck, forsooth! Nay, your craft shall sail with flying colours yet. But I hear the voices of Burleigh and Leicester in the ante-chamber! Your good uncle is like to die of jealousy; if he finds I am closeted with you he will come to the Council in an ill temper, and rouse the lion in me. So, farewell till the evening, when I command your presence at the banquet."

"Madam, there is yet one word I would say. It is upon my good father's affairs."

"What now? Henry Sidney is alway complaining—no money, no favour! As to the money, he has spent a goodly sum in Ireland, and yet cries out for more, and would fain go thither again, and take you with him, to squander more coin."

"I have no desire, Madam, either for him to go to Ireland or for myself to accompany him. But I pray you to consider how small a pittance he receives as Lord President of Wales. It is ever a struggle for my mother to maintain the dignity of your representative there. She is wearing out her life in a vain effort, and you, Madam, surely know that her nature is noble, and that she seeks only to promote the welfare of others."

“Ay! Mary Sidney is well enough. We will think over the matter. Command her to come to Court for this Whitsuntide, there is a chamber at her service. Now, I must to business. Stay if it suits you; you have more wits than all the rest of us put together. Yes, that is Leicester’s step and voice.”

Philip knew better than to remain without express invitation to do so from his uncle, the Earl of Leicester. It was, perhaps, only natural that the elder man should be jealous of the younger, who had, when scarcely four-and-twenty, already gained a reputation for statesmanship at home and abroad. Brilliant as Leicester was, he was secretly conscious that there were heights which he had failed to reach, and that his nephew, Philip Sidney, had won a place in the favour of his sovereign, which even the honest protest he had made against this marriage with the Duke of Anjou had failed to destroy; a high place also in the esteem of the world by the purity of his life and the nobleness of a nature which commended itself alike to gentle and simple; while he had the reputation of a true knight and brave soldier, pure, and without reproach, as well as a scholar versed in the literature of other countries, and foremost himself amongst the scholars and poets of the day.

Philip Sidney left the presence-chamber by another door as his uncle and Lord Burleigh entered it, and went to his own apartments, where he expected to meet some friends, and discuss with them topics more interesting and profitable than the intrigues of the Court and the Queen’s matrimonial projects.

Edmund Spenser’s dedication to the *Shepherd’s*

Calendar is well known, and there can be no doubt that he owed much to Sidney's discriminating patronage.

That dedication was no empty compliment to win favour, and the friendship between Edmund Spenser and Philip Sidney gathered strength with time. They had often walked together under the trees at Penshurst, and a sort of club had been established, of which the members were Gabriel Harvey, Edward Dyer, Fulke Greville and others, intended for the formation of a new school of poetry. Philip Sidney was the president, and Spenser the youngest and most enthusiastic member, while Gabriel Harvey, who was the oldest, was most strict in enforcing the rules laid down, and ready with counsel and encouragement.

The result of all the deliberations of this club were very curious, and the attempt made to force the English tongue into hexameters and iambics signally failed.

Philip Sidney and Spenser were the first to discover that the hexameter could never take its place in English verse, and they had to endure some opposition and even raillery from Gabriel Harvey, who was especially annoyed at Edmund Spenser's desertion; and had bid him farewell till God or some good angel put him in a better mind.

This literary club had broken up three years before this time, but Edmund Spenser and Sir Fulke Greville still corresponded or met at intervals with Sidney to compare their literary efforts and criticise them freely, Spenser's always being pronounced, as doubtless they were, far above the others in beauty of style and poetical conception.

By Philip Sidney's influence Spenser had been sent to Ireland as secretary to Lord Grey of Wilton, whose recall was now considered certain. Sir Henry Sidney would have been willing to return as Deputy with his son under him; but, having been badly supported in the past, he stipulated that the Queen should reward his long service by a peerage and a grant of money or lands as a public mark of her confidence.

Philip found Sir Fulke Greville in his room, and with him Edward Dyer, who had come to discuss a letter from Edmund Spenser, which he wished his friends to hear.

"He fears he shall lose his place if Lord Grey be recalled, and beseeches me," Philip said, "to do my best that he should remain secretary to whomsoever the Queen may appoint."

"And that will be an easy matter, methinks," Dyer said, "if the rumour is true that your good father is again to be appointed Deputy of Ireland, with you for his helper."

"Contradict that rumour, good Ned," Philip said. "There is but the barest chance of the Queen's reinstating my father, and if, indeed, it happened so, I should not accept the post under him. I will write to our friend Spenser and bid him take courage. His friends will not desert him. But I have here a stanza or two of the *Fairie Queene*, for which Edmund begs me to seek your approval or condemnation."

"It will be the first," Fulke Greville said, "as he very well knows, and it will not surprise me to find our good friend Harvey at last giving him his meed of praise, albeit he was so rash as to say that hexa-

“The joyous birdes, shrouded in cheerefull shade,
Their notes unto the voyce attempred sweet,
Th’ angelicall soft trembling voyces made
To th’ instruments divine respondence meet;
The silver-sounding instruments did meet
With the base murmure of the waters’ fall,
The waters’ fall with difference discreet,
Now soft, now loud, unto the wind did call,
The gentle warbling wind low answered to all.”

We may well think that these stanzas, which form a part of the 12th canto of the Second Book of the *Faerie Queene* have seldom been read to a more appreciative audience, nor by a more musical voice. After a moment’s silence, Edward Dyer said,—

“I find nought to complain of in all these lines. They flow like the stream rippling adown from the mountain side—a stream as pure as the fountain whence it springs.”

“Ay,” Fulke Greville said; “that is true. Methinks the hypercritic might say there should not be two words of the same spelling and sound and meaning, to make the rhyme, as in the lines ending with meet.”

“A truce to such comment, Fulke,” Philip said. “Rhyme is not of necessity poetry, nor poetry rhyme. There be many true poets who never strung a rhyme, and rhymers who know nought of poetry.”

“But, hearken; Edmund has wrote more verses on the further side of this sheet. I will e’en read them, if it pleases you to hear.”

Fulke Greville made a gesture of assent, and Philip Sidney read, with a depth of pathos in his voice which thrilled the listeners,—

“Ah! see, whoso faire thing dost faine to see,
 In springing flowre the image of thy day!
 Ah! see the virgin rose, how sweetly shee
 Doth first peepe forth with bashful modestee,
 That fairer seemes, the lesse ye see her may!
 Lo! see soone after how more bold and free
 Her bared bosome she doth broad display.
 Lo! see soone after how she fades and falls away!

“So passeth, in the passing of a day,
 Of mortall life, the leafe, the bud, the flowre,
 No more doth flourish after first decay.
 That erst was sought to deck both bed and bowre
 Of many a ladie, and many a paramoure!
 Gather, therefore, the rose, whilst yet is prime,
 For soon comes age that will her pride deflowre;
 Gather the rose of love, whilst yet is time,
 Whilst loving thou mayst loved be with equall crime.”

These last verses were received in silence. There was no remark made on them, and no criticism.

Probably both Sidney's friends felt that they referred to what was too sacred to be touched by a careless hand; and, indeed, there was no one, even amongst Philip's dearest friends, except his sister Mary, the Countess of Pembroke, who ever approached the subject of his love for Stella—that rose which Philip had not gathered when within his reach, and which was now drooping under an influence more merciless than that of age—the baneful influence of a most unhappy marriage.

The Queen had that very morning spoken out with a pitiless bluntness, which had made Philip unusually thoughtful. The very words the Queen had used haunted him—“tale-bearers, who had neither clean hearts nor clean tongue.”

Edward Dyer, according to the custom of the friends when they met, read some verses he had lately composed, and Fulke Greville followed.

Then Philip Sidney was called upon to contribute a sonnet or stanza.

If he never reached the highest standard of poetry, and, even in his best stanzas of *Stella and Astrophel*, rivalled the sweet flow of Edmund Spenser's verse, he had the gift of making his verses vividly express what was uppermost in his mind at the moment, as many of the *Stella and Astrophel* poems abundantly testify.

In early youth Philip Sidney had been influenced by a distinguished convert to the Reformed Faith, Hubert Languet, whom he met at Frankfort. Between this man of fifty-four and the boy of eighteen, who had gone abroad for thoughtful travel and diligent study, a strong—even a romantic—friendship had sprung up, and the letters which have been preserved show how unwavering Hubert Languet was in his devotion to the young Englishman, whose fine and noble qualities he had been quick to discover.

About this time Philip was anxious as to the health of his old friend. His letters had been less frequent, and the last he had received during the present year, had seemed to tell of failing powers of body, though the mind was as vigorous as ever.

Thus, the two verses which Philip now read from his *Arcadia* had reference to his old and dearly-loved counsellor and friend, and were inspired by the lifelong gratitude he felt for him. They are clothed, as was the too frequent custom of the time, in pastoral images;

but Fulke Greville and Edward Dyer listened spellbound as the words were uttered, in musical tones, with a strength of feeling underlying them, which gave every line a deep significance.

“The song I sang, old Languet had me taught,
Languet, the shepherd, best swift Ister knew;
For, clerkly read, and hating what is naught
For faithful heart, clean hands, and mouth as true,
With his sweet skill my skilless youth he drew,
To have a feeling taste of Him that sits
Beyond the heaven, far more beyond our wits.

He said the music best those powers pleased,
Was jump accord between our wit and will,
Where highest notes to godliness are raised,
And lowest sink, not down to jot of ill,
With old true tales he wont mine ears to fill,
How shepherds did of yore, how now they thrive,
Spoiling their flock, or while 'twixt them they strive.”

“There is naught to complain of in those verses, Philip,” Fulke Greville said. “He must be a sharp censor, indeed, who could find fault with them. We must do our best to bring good old Gabriel Harvey back to join our Areopagus, as Edmund Spenser is bold enough to call it.”

“Have you heard aught of the friend in whose praise the verses were indited?” Edward Dyer asked.

“Nay, as I said, I have had but one letter from Languet for many months. As soon as this tourney is over I must get leave to make a journey to Holland to assure myself of his condition.”

“The Queen will rebel against your absence, Philip. You are in higher favour than ever, methinks; nor do

I grudge you the honour, as, I fear, some I could name grudge it."

Philip rose quickly, as if unwilling to enter into the subject, and gathering together their papers, the three friends broke up their meeting and separated till the evening.

Anyone who had seen Philip Sidney as he threw himself on a settle when Fulke Greville and Edward Dyer had left him, and had watched the profound sadness of his face as he gave himself up to meditation on the sorrow which oppressed him, would have found it difficult to imagine how the graceful courtier, who that evening after the banquet at Whitehall led the Queen, as a mark of especial favour, through the mazes of the dance, could ever have so completely thrown off the melancholy mood for one of gaiety and apparent joyousness. How many looked at him with envy when the Queen gave him her hand in the dance then much in fashion called the "Brawl!" This dance had been lately introduced, and the Queen delighted in it, as it gave her the opportunity of distinguishing the reigning favourite with an especial mark of her favour.

This evening the ring was formed of ladies and gentlemen chosen by Elizabeth, who gorgeously attired, her hoop and stiff brocade making a wide circle in the centre of the ring, called upon Philip Sidney to stand there with her.

The Queen then, giving her hand to Philip, pirouetted with him to the sound of the music, and, stopping before the gentleman she singled out for her favour, kissed him on the left cheek, while Philip, bending on

his knee, performed the same ceremony with the lady who had been the partner of the gentleman before whom the Queen had stopped. By the rules of the dance, the couple who stood in the centre of the ring now changed places with those who had been saluted, but this did not suit the Queen's mind this evening.

She always delighted to display her dancing powers before her admiring courtiers, exciting, as she believed, the jealousy of the ladies, who could not have the same opportunity of showing their graceful movements in the "Brawl."

The Queen selected Lord Leicester and Christopher Hatton and Fulke Greville and several other gentlemen, and curtsied and tripped like a girl of sixteen instead of a mature lady of forty-nine.

Elizabeth's caprice made her pass over again and again several courtiers who were burning with ill-concealed anger as they saw Leicester and his nephew chosen again and again, while they were passed over.

At last the Queen was tired, and ordered the music to cease. She was led by Leicester to the raised dais at the end of the withdrawing-room where the dancing took place, and then, at her command, Philip Sidney sang to the mandoline some laudatory verses which he had composed in her honour.

The Queen contrived to keep him near her for most of the evening, but he escaped now and then to circulate amongst the ladies of the Court and to answer questions about the coming tournament.

In one of the alcoves formed by the deep bay of one of the windows Philip found his sister, the Countess

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of Pembroke, who was purposely waiting there to see him alone, if possible.

"I have been waiting for you, Philip," she said, "to ask who will arrange the position my gentlewomen will occupy at the tourney. I have several eager to see the show, more eager, methinks, than their mistress, amongst them the little country maiden, Lucy Forrester, whom you know of."

"I will give what orders I can to those who control such matters. But, my sweet sister, you look graver than your wont."

"Do I, Philip? Perhaps there is a reason; I would I could feel happy in the assurance that you have freed yourself from the bonds which I know in your better moments you feel irksome. You will have no real peace of mind till you have freed yourself, and that I know well."

"I am in no mood for reproaches to-night, Mary," Philip said, with more heat than he often showed when speaking to his dearly-loved sister. "Let me have respite till this tournament is over at least." And as he spoke, his eyes were following Lady Rich as she moved through the mazes of a Saraband—a stately Spanish dance introduced to the English Court when Philip was the consort of poor Queen Mary.

"I might now be in the coveted position of Charles Blount in yonder dance," Philip said. "I refrained from claiming my right to take it, and came hither to you instead."

"Your right! Nay, Philip, you have no right. Dear brother, does it never seem to you that you do her whom you love harm by persisting in that very love

which is—yes, Philip, I must say it—unlawful? See, now, I am struck with the change in her since I beheld her last. The modesty which charmed me in Penelope Devereux seems vanished. Even now I hear her laugh, hollow and unreal, as she coquettes and lays herself out for the admiring notice of the gentlemen who are watching her movements. Yes, Philip, nothing but harm can come of persisting in this unhappy passion.”

“Harm to her! Nay, I would die sooner than that harm should befall her through me. I pray you, Mary, let us speak of other matters.” But though he did begin to discuss the affairs of his father, and to beg Lady Pembroke to advise his mother to be wary in what she urged when the Queen gave her an interview, it was evident to his sister that his thoughts were in the direction of his eyes, and that she could not hope to get from him the wise advice as to her father’s embarrassments which she had expected.

But the gently exercised influence of his pure and high-minded sister had its effect, and long after the sounds of revelry had died away, and the quiet of night had fallen upon the palace, there was one who could not sleep.

Philip Sidney was restlessly pacing to and fro in the confined space of the chamber allotted to him at Whitehall, and this sonnet, one of the most beautiful which he ever wrote, will express better than any other words what effect his sister’s counsel had upon him.

“Leave me, oh! Love! which reachest but to dust,
And thou, my mind, aspire to higher things,
Grow rich in that, which never taketh rust.
Whatever fades, but fading pleasure brings.

Draw in thy beams, and humble all thy might,
To that sweet yoke, where lasting freedoms be,
Which breaks the clouds, and opens forth the light
That doth both shine and give us sight to see.

Oh! take fast hold! let that light be thy guide
In this small course which birth draws out to Death,
And think how evil becometh him to slide
Who seeketh heaven, and comes of heavenly breath.
Then farewell world, thy uttermost I see;
Eternal Love, maintain thy life in me."

The clouds were soon to break and the light shine upon the way in that "small course" which yet lay before him.

We who can look onward to the few years yet left to Philip Sidney, and can even now lament that they were so few, know how his aspirations were abundantly fulfilled, and that Love Eternal did indeed maintain its life in his noble and true heart.

CHAPTER VII.

WHITSUNTIDE, 1581.

"The greater stroke astonisheth the more;
 Astonishment takes from us sense of pain;
 I stood amazed when others' tears begun,
 And now begin to weep, when they have done."

HENRY CONSTABLE, 1586.

AFTER Lucy's departure from Penshurst, Mary Gifford kept her boy continually in sight, and, however restive Ambrose might be under the control which his grandmother exercised over him, he was generally obedient to his mother.

His high spirit was curbed by a look from her, and having promised that he would not go beyond the gate leading from the farmyard on one side of Ford Manor, or into the lane which led to the highroad on the other, Ambrose held that promise sacred.

He trotted along by his mother's side as she performed the duties in the dairy and poultry-yard, which Lucy's absence in the household had made it necessary for her to undertake. Although it was a relief that peace reigned now that the wranglings between their stepmother and Lucy had ceased, Mary found the additional work a great strain upon her, however glad she was to have her hands well occupied, that she might have less time to brood over the fears which her husband's visit and threats had aroused.

Two weeks had now gone by, and these fears were comparatively laid to rest. Mary thought that her husband would not risk being seen in the neighbourhood, as news came through the Puritan friends of Mrs. Forrester that several Papists had been seized at Tunbridge, and had been thrown into prison, on the suspicion that they were concerned in one of the Popish plots of which the Protestants were continually in dread, and in one of which Edmund Campian was implicated.

Indeed, there was an almost universal feeling throughout the country that the Papists cherished evil designs against the Queen's life, and that they were only biding their time to league with those who wished to place the captive Queen of Scotland on the throne, and so restore England to her allegiance to the Pope.

News of the imprisonment of this celebrated Edmund Campian had been circulated about this time through the country, and stories of the manner in which he had been mercilessly tortured to extract from him the confession of a plot against Elizabeth's life.

On the Sunday after Ascension Day there were to be great shows and games in the village of Penshurst, and Ambrose, hearing of them from his friend Ned the cowherd, on Saturday evening, begged his mother to let him see the sports.

"There's a wrestling match," he urged, "on the green, and a tilting between horsemen in the outer park. Mother, I'd like to see it; do take me down to see it. Oh! mother, do; I'll hold you hand all the time; I won't run away from you, no, not an inch. I

am six years old. I am big enough now to take care of *you*, if there's a crowd or the horses plunge and kick. Ned says it will be a brave show."

"I will go down to church with you, Ambrose," his mother said, "and if I can secure a safe place I will wait for a part of the sports, but you must not fret if I do not stay to see the sports end, for I am tired, Ambrose, and I would fain have rest on Sunday."

The child looked wistfully into his mother's face.

"I'll be a very good boy, mother. I *have* been a good boy," he said, "and you will tell Mr. Sidney that I didn't plague you, and tell Master Humphrey too. He said I was a plague to you, and I hate him for saying it."

"Hush, Ambrose, Master Ratcliffe will be a good friend to you, if—"

"If what? if *I* am good?"

"I meant, if ever you had no mother to care for you."

"No mother!" the child repeated, only dimly catching her meaning. "No mother!" and there was a sudden change in his voice, which told of something that was partly fear and partly incredulity. "No mother! but you said we should always have each other. I have you, and you have me. You said I must not leave you, and," with vehemence, "you *sha'n't* leave me."

"Ambrose, God's will must be done, let us trust him."

But the boy's serious mood passed, and he was now capering about and singing in a joyous monotone as he went to find Ned in the farmyard.

"I am to see the sports on the morrow. I'm to see the sports on the green."

The words reached other ears than Ned's. His grandmother came out of the bakehouse, where she had been storing piles of loaves on a high shelf, which had just been taken from the oven, and called out,—

"Sports on the Lord's Day, what does the child say? No one who eats my bread shall see that day profaned. The wrath of the Almighty will fall on their heads, whoever they be, mind that, Mary Gifford, mind that! Ay, I know what you will say, that the Queen lends her countenance to them, and your grand folk in the great house, but as sure as you live, Mary Gifford, a curse will fall on your head if you let that child witness this wickedness."

Mary took refuge in silence, but her stepmother's words sounded in her ears like a knell.

For herself she would willingly have dispensed with games and sports on Sundays. Her sympathies were with those who, taking the just view of the seventh day, believed that God had ordained it for the refreshment both of body and soul—a day when, free from the labours of this toilsome world, the body should rest, and the soul have quiet and leisure for meditation in private, and for prayer and praise in the services appointed by the Church.

Sports and merry-making were quite as much out of harmony with Mary Gifford's feelings as they were with her stepmother's, but, in the due observance of Sunday, as in many other things, the extreme Puritan failed to influence those around them by their harsh

insistance on the letter which killeth, and the utter absence of that spirit of love which giveth life.

The villagers assembled in the churchyard on this Sunday morning were not so numerous as sometimes, and the pew occupied by the Sidneys, when the family was in residence at the Park, was empty.

Mary Gifford and her boy, as they knelt together by a bench near the chancel steps, attracted the attention of the old Rector. He had seen them before, and had many times exchanged a kindly greeting with Mary and complimented Lucy on her "lilies and roses," and asked in a jocose way for that good and amiable lady, their stepmother! But there was something in Mary's attitude and rapt devotion as the light of the east window fell on her, that struck the good old man as unusual.

When the service was over, he stepped up to her as she was crossing the churchyard, and asked her to come into the Rectory garden to rest.

"For," he added, "you look a-weary, Mistress Gifford, and need refreshment ere you climb the hill again."

The Rectory garden was an Eden of delight to little Ambrose. His mother let him wander away in the winding paths, intersecting the close-cut yew hedges, with no fear of lurking danger, while, at the Rector's invitation, she sat with him in a bower, over which a tangle of early roses and honeysuckle hung, and filled the air with fragrance. A rosy-cheeked maiden with bare arms, in a blue kirtle scarcely reaching below the knees, which displayed a pair of sturdy legs cased in leather boots, brought a wooden trencher of bread and

cheese, with a large mug of spiced ale, and set them down on the table, fixed to the floor of the summer bower, with a broad smile.

As Ambrose ran past, chasing a pair of white butterflies, the Rector said,—

“That is a fine boy, Mistress Gifford. I doubt not, doubly precious, as the only son of his mother, who is a widow. I hear Master Philip Sidney looks at him with favour; and, no doubt, he will see that he is well trained in service which will stand him in good stead in life.”

“Ambrose is my only joy, sir,” Mary replied. “All that is left to me of earthly joy, I would say. I pray to be helped to bring him up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. But it is a great charge.”

“Take heart, Mistress Gifford; there are many childless folk who would envy you your charge, but, methinks, you have the air of one who is burdened with a hidden grief. Now, if I can, by hearing it, assuage it, and you would fain bring it to me, I would do what in me lies as a minister of Christ to give you counsel.”

“You are very good, kind sir, but there are griefs which no human hand can touch.”

“I know it, I know it, for I have had experience therein. There was one I loved beyond all words, and God gave her to me. I fell under heavy displeasure for daring to break through the old custom of the Church—before she was purged of many abuses, which forbids the marriage of her priests—and my beloved was snatched from me by ruthless hands, even as we stood before the altar of God.

"She died broken-hearted. It is forty years come Michaelmas, but the wound is fresh; and I yet need to go to the Physician of Souls for healing.

"When the hard times of persecution came, and our blessed young King died, and I had to flee for my life, I could thank God she was spared the misery of being turned out in the wide world to beg her bread, with the children God might have given us. Then, when the sun shone on us Protestants, and our present Queen—God bless her!—ascended the throne, and I came hither, the hungry longing for my lost one oppressed me. But the Lord gives, and the Lord takes away: let us both say, 'Blessed be His holy name.' Now, summon the boy to partake of this simple fare, and remember, Mistress Gifford, if you want a friend, you can resort to me. I am now bound for the parish of Leigh, where I say evensong at five o'clock."

Mary called Ambrose, and said,—

"Bless my child, sir, and bless me also."

Ambrose, at his mother's bidding, knelt by her side, and the Rector pronounced the blessing, which has always a peculiar significance for those who are troubled in spirit.

"To the Lord's gracious keeping I commit you. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you, and give you peace—now, and for evermore."

A fervid "Amen" came from the mother's lips, and was echoed by the child's, as the old man's footsteps were heard on the path as he returned to the Rectory.

It was a very happy afternoon for Ambrose. He enjoyed his dinner of wheaten bread and creamy

cheese; and his mother smiled to see him as he buried his face in the large mug, and, after a good draught of the spiced drink, smacked his lips, saying,—

“That is good drink, sweeter than the sour cider of which grandmother gives me a sup. Aunt Lou says it is as sour as grandmother, who brews it. Aunt Lucy is having sweet drinks now, and pasties, and all manner of nice things. Why can’t we go to London, mother, you and I?”

“Not yet, my boy, not yet.”

And then Ambrose subsided into a noonday sleep, curled up on the rude bench which was fixed round the summer bower. His mother put her arm round him, and he nestled close to her.

Peace! the peace the old Rector had called down upon her seemed to fill Mary Gifford’s heart; and that quiet hour of the Sunday noontide remained in her memory in the coming days, as the last she was to know for many a long year.

“The sports, mother!” Ambrose said, rousing himself at last, and struggling to his feet. “Let us go to see the sports.”

“Would you please me, Ambrose, by going home instead?”

Ambrose’s lips quivered, and the colour rushed to his face.

“I want to see the sports,” he said; “you promised you would take me.”

Then Mary Gifford rose, and, looking down on the child’s troubled face, where keen disappointment was written, she took his hand, saying,—

Come, then; but if the crowd is great, and you are

jostled and pushed, you must come away, nor plague me to stay. I am not stout enough to battle with a throng, and it may be that harm will come to you."

They were at the Rectory gates now, and people were seen in all their Sunday trim hurrying towards the field where the tilting match was to take place.

Mary turned towards the square, on either side of which stood the old timbered houses by the lych gate, and asked a man she knew, if the horsemen who were to tilt in the field were to pass that way.

"For," she added, "I would fain wait here till they have ridden on. I might get into danger with the child from the horses' feet."

"Better have a care, mistress," was the reply, and he added; "scant blessings come to those who turn Sunday into a day of revelry."

"Ah!" said another voice, "you be one of the saints, Jeremy; but why be hard on country folk for a little merry-making, when the Queen and all the grand nobles and ladies do the same, so I've heard, at Court."

"I tell you," was the reply, "it's the old Popish custom—mass in the morning, and feasting and revelling all the rest of the day. I tell you, it is these licences which make the Nonconformists our bitter foes."

"Foes!" the other said. "Ay, there's a pack of 'em all round. Some seen, some unseen—Papists and Puritans—but, thank the stars, I care not a groat for either. I am contented, any way. Saint or sinner, Puritan or Papist, I say, let 'em alone, if they'll let me alone."

"Ay, there's the rub," said the other, "there's no letting alone. You and I may live to see the fires kindled again, and burn ourselves, for that matter."

"I sha'n't burn. I know a way out of that. I watch the tide, and turn my craft to sail along with it."

And this easy-going time-server, of whom there are a good many descendants in the present day, laughed a careless laugh, and then, as the sound of horses' feet was heard, and that of the crowd drawing near, he good-naturedly lifted Ambrose on his shoulder, and, planting his broad back against the trunk of the great overshadowing elm, he told the boy to sit steady, and he would carry him to the wall skirting the field, where he could see all that was going on.

Mary Gifford followed, and, feeling Ambrose was safe, was glad he should be gratified with so little trouble and risk. She rested herself on a large stone by the wall, Ambrose standing above her, held there by the strong arm of the man who had befriended them.

The tilt was not very exciting, for many of the best horses and men had been called into requisition by the gentry of the neighbourhood, for the far grander and more important show to come off at Whitehall in the following week.

The spectators, however, seemed well satisfied, to judge by their huzzas and cheers which hailed the victor in every passage of arms—cheers in which little Ambrose, from his vantage ground, heartily joined.

At last it was over, and the throng came out of the field, the victor bearing on the point of his tilting pole a crown made of gilded leaves, which was a good deal battered, and had been competed for by these village knights on several former occasions.

Like the challenge cups and shields of a later time,

these trophies were held as the property of the conqueror, till, perhaps, at a future trial, he was vanquished, and then the crown passed into the keeping of another victor.

Mary Gifford thanked the man, who had been so kind to her boy, with one of her sweetest smiles, and Ambrose, at her bidding, said,—

“Thank you, kind sir, for letting me see the show. I’d like to see the game of bowls now where all the folk are going.”

“No, no, Ambrose! you have had enough. We must go home, and you must get to bed early, for your little legs must be tired.”

“Tired! I’d never be tired of seeing horses gallop and prance. Only, I long to be astride of one, as I was of Mr. Philip Sidney’s.”

Mother and son pursued their way up the hill, Ambrose going over the events of the day in childish fashion—wanting no reply, nor even attention from his mother, while she was thinking over the different ways in matters of religion of those who called themselves Christians.

These Sunday sports were denounced by some as sinful—and a sign of return to the thralldom of Popery from which the kingdom had been delivered; others saw in them no harm, if they did not actually countenance them by their presence; while others, like herself, had many misgivings as to the desirability of turning the day of rest into a day of merry-making, more, perhaps, from personal taste and personal feeling than from principle.

When Mary Gifford reached Ford Manor, she found

it deserted, and only one old serving-man keeping guard. The mistress had gone with the rest of the household to a prayer and praise meeting, held in the barn belonging to a neighbouring yeoman, two miles away; and he only hoped, he said, that she might return in a sweeter temper than she went. She had rated him and scolded all round till she had scarce a breath left in her.

The old man was, like all the other servants, devoted to the gentle lady who had gone out from her home a fair young girl, and had returned a sad widow with her only child, overshadowed by a great trouble, the particulars of which no one knew.

The rest of that Sabbath day was quiet and peaceful.

Mary read from Tyndale's version of the Testament her favourite chapter from the Epistle of St. John, and the love of which it told seemed to fill her with confidence and descend dove-like upon her boy's turbulent young heart.

He was in his softest, tenderest mood, and, as Mary pressed him close to her side, she felt comforted, and said to herself,—

“While I have my boy, I can bear all things, with God's help.”

Mary Gifford was up long before sunrise the next morning, and, calling Ambrose, she bid him come out with her and see if the shepherd had brought in a lamb which had wandered away from the fold on the previous day. The shepherd had been afraid to tell his mistress of the loss, and Mary had promised to keep it from her till he had made yet another search;

and then, if indeed it was hopeless, she would try to soften Mistress Forrester's anger against him.

"We may perchance meet him with the news that he has found the lamb, and then there will be no need to let grannie know that it had been lost," she said.

It was a dull morning, and the clouds lay low in a leaden sky, while a mist was hovering over the hills and blurring out the landscape.

The larks were soon lost to sight as they soared overhead, singing faintly as they rose; the rooks gave prolonged and melancholy caws as they took their early flight, and the cocks crowed querulously in the yard, while now and then there was a pitiful bleat from the old ewe which had lost her lamb.

In the intervals of sound, the stillness was more profound, and there was a sense of oppression hanging over everything, which even Ambrose felt.

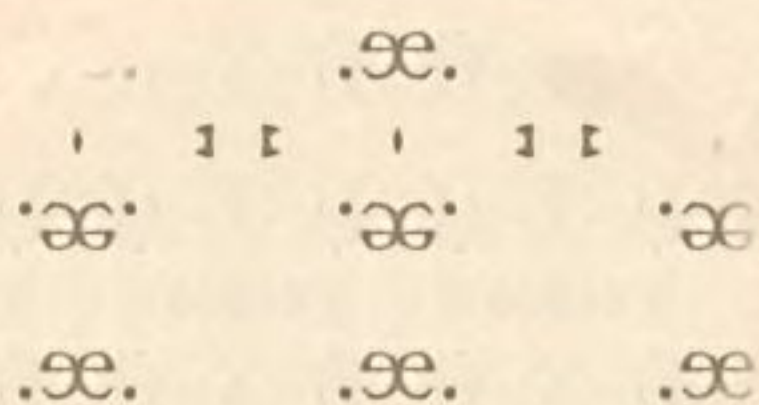
The moor stretched away in the haze, which gave the hillocks of gorse and heather and the slight eminences of the open ground an unnatural size.

Every moment Mary hoped to see the shepherd's well-known figure looming before her in the mist with the lamb in his arms, but no shepherd appeared.

"We must turn our steps back again, Ambrose. Perhaps the shepherd has gone down into the valley, and it is chill and damp for you to be out longer; when the sun gets up it will be warmer."

She had scarcely spoken, when a figure appeared through the haze, like every other object, looking unnaturally large.

"Quick, Ambrose," she said, "quick!" and, seizing



the child's hand, she began to run at her utmost speed along the sheep-path towards the stile leading into the Manor grounds, near the farmyard.

The child looked behind to see what had frightened his mother.

"It's the big black man!" he said.

But Mary made no answer. She ran on, regardless of hillocks and big stones—heedless of her steps, and thinking only of her pursuer.

Presently her foot caught in a tangle of heather, and she fell heavily, as she was running at full speed, and struck her head against some sharp stones lying in a heap at the edge of the track, which could hardly be called a path.

"Mother! mother!" Ambrose called; and in another moment a hand was laid on his shoulder—a strong hand, with a grasp which the child felt it was hopeless to resist. "Mother! mother!"

The cry of distress might well have softened the hardest heart; but men like Ambrose Gifford are not troubled with what is commonly understood by a heart. He spoke, however, in gentle tones.

"My poor child, your mother is much hurt. We must seek for the aid of a surgeon. We must get help to carry her home. Come with me, and we will soon get help."

"No, no; I will not leave my mother," Ambrose said, throwing himself on the ground by her side. "Why doesn't she speak or move? *Mother!*"

Alas! there was no answer; and a little red stream trickling down from a wound on the forehead frightened Ambrose still more.

"It is blood!" he cried, with the natural shrinking which children always show when their own fingers are cut. "It is blood! Oh, mother!"

But Ambrose was now quietly lifted in a pair of strong arms, and the words spoken in his ear,—

"We must seek help; we will get a surgeon. Your mother will die if we do not get help, boy. Hush! If you cry out your mother may hear, and you will distress her. Hush!"

Poor little Ambrose now subsided into a low wail of agony as he felt himself borne along.

"Where are you going, sir? Set me down, set me down."

"We go for help for your mother. Let that suffice."

Ambrose now made a renewed struggle for freedom. It was the last; he felt something put over his face, so that he could neither see where he was going nor utter another cry; he only knew he was being carried off by this strange man he knew not where, and that he had left his mother lying pale and still, with that terrible red stream trickling from her forehead, on the hillock of heather on the moor.

It is said, and perhaps with truth, that the bitterest hate is felt by the sinner against the sufferer for his sin. This hatred was in Ambrose Gifford's heart, and was the primary cause of his thus forcibly taking from the wife whom he had so cruelly betrayed, the child who was so infinitely precious to her.

Ambrose Gifford had, no doubt, by subtle casuistry persuaded himself that he was doing good to the boy. He would be educated by the Jesuits, with whom he had cast in his lot; he would be trained as a son of the

Catholic Church, and by this he hoped to gain favour, and strike off a few years of purgatorial fire for his past sins!

He had confessed and done penance for the disgraceful acts of which he had been guilty, and he had been received into the refuge the Roman Church was ready to offer to him.

At this time she was making every effort to strengthen her outposts, and to prepare for the struggle which at any moment she might be called upon to make to regain her coveted ascendancy in England.

The seminary founded at Douay by a certain Dr. Allen, a fine scholar, who was educated at Oxford, was much resorted to by persecuted Catholics who sought a refuge there. Or by men like Ambrose Gifford, who, obliged to leave the country under the shadow of a crime committed, were glad to throw themselves into the arms ready to receive them, and, as they would have expressed it, find pardon and peace by fasting and penance in the bosom of the Catholic Church. Doubtless, the great majority of those who gathered at Douay at this time were devout and persecuted members of the Church, from the bondage of which Elizabeth had delivered her country, with the hearty approbation of her loyal subjects.

But, black sheep like Ambrose Gifford went thither to be washed and outwardly reformed; and he, being a man of considerable ability and shrewdness, had after a time of probation been despatched to England to beat up recruits and to bring back word how the Catholic cause was prospering there.

He had, therefore, every reason to wish to take with

him his own boy, whose fine physique and noble air he had noted with pride as he had, unseen, watched him for the last few weeks when haunting the neighbourhood like an evil spirit.

He would do him credit, and reward all the pains taken to educate him and bring him up as a good Catholic.

The motives which prompted him to this were mixed, and revenge against his wife was perhaps the dominant feeling. She loved that boy better than anything on earth; she would bring him up in the faith of the Reformed Church, and teach him, probably, to hate his father.

He would, at any rate, get possession of this her idol, and punish her for the words she had spoken to him by the porch of the farm, on that summer evening now more than two weeks ago.

Ambrose Gifford had deceived Mary from the first, professing to be a Protestant while it served his purpose to win favour in the household of the Earl of Leicester, but in reality he was a Catholic, and only waited the turn of the tide to declare himself. He led a bad, immoral life, and it was scarcely more than two years after her marriage that Mary Gifford's eyes were opened to the true character of the man who had won her in her inexperienced girlhood by his handsome person—in which the boy resembled him—his suave manner, and his passionate protestations of devotion to her.

Many women have had a like bitter lesson to learn, but perhaps few have felt as Mary did, humbled in the very dust, when she awoke to the reality of her position, that the love offered her had been unworthy the name,

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and that she had been betrayed and deceived by a man who, as soon as the first glamour of his passion was over, showed himself in his true colours, and expected her to take his conduct as a matter of course, leaving her free, as he basely insinuated, to console herself as she liked with other admirers.

To the absolutely pure woman this was the final death-blow of all hope for the future, and all peace in the present. Mary fled to her old home with her boy, and soon after heard the report that her husband had been killed in a fray, and that if he had lived he would have been arrested and condemned for the secret attack made on his victim, and also as a disguised Catholic supposed to be in league with those who were then plotting against the life of the Queen.

About a year before this time, a gentleman of the Earl of Leicester's household, when at Penshurst, had told Mary Gifford that Ambrose Gifford was alive—that he had escaped to join the Jesuits at Douay, and was employed by them as one of their most shrewd and able emissaries. From that moment her peace of mind was gone, and the change that had come over her had been apparent to everyone.

The sadness in her sweet face deepened, and a melancholy oppressed her, except, indeed, when with her boy, who was a source of unfailing delight, mingled with fear, lest she should lose him, by his father's machinations.

It was not till fully half-an-hour after Ambrose had been carried away, that the shepherd, with his

staff in his hand and the lost lamb thrown over his shoulder, came to the place where Mary was lying.

She had recovered consciousness, but was quite unable to move. Besides the cut on her forehead, she had sprained her ankle, and the attempt to rise had given her such agony that she had fallen back again.

"Ay, then! lack-a-day, Mistress Gifford," the shepherd said, "how did this come about. Dear heart alive! you look like a ghost."

"I have fallen," gasped Mary. "But where is my boy—where is Ambrose? Get me tidings of him, I pray you, good Jenkyns."

"Lord! I must get help for you before I think of the boy. He has run home, I dare to say, the young urchin; he is safe enough."

"No, no," Mary said. "Oh! Jenkyns, for the love of Heaven, hasten to find my boy, or I shall die of grief."

The worthy shepherd needed no further entreaty. He hastened away, taking the stile with a great stride, and, going up to the back door of the house, he called Mistress Forrester to come as quick as she could, for there was trouble on the moor.

Mistress Forrester was at this moment engaged in superintending the feeding of a couple of fine young pigs, which had been bought in Tunbridge a few days before. Her skirts were tucked up to her waist, and she had a large hood over her head, which added to her grotesque appearance.

"Another lamb lost? I protest, Jenkyns, if you go on losing lambs after this fashion you may find somebody else's lambs to lose, and leave mine alone. A little

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more barleymeal in that trough, Ned—the porkers must be well fed if I am to make a profit of 'em and not a loss."

"Hearken, Madam Forrester," Jenkyns said, "the lamb is safe, but Mistress Gifford is lying yonder more dead than alive. Ned, there! come and help me to lift her home—and where's the boy, eh?"

"What boy?" Mrs. Forrester asked sharply.

"Mistress Gifford's son," Jenkyns said, "his mother is crying out for him amain, poor soul! She is in a bad case—you'd best look after her, there's blood running down from a cut on her forehead. Here!" calling to one of the women, "here, if the Mistress won't come, you'd best do so—and bring a pitcher of water with you, for she is like to swoon, by the looks of her."

"You mind your own business, Amice," Mistress Forrester said, as she smoothed down her coarse homespun skirt, and settled the hood on her head. "You bide where you are, and see the poultry are fed, as she who ought to have fed 'em isn't here."

"Nor ever will be again, mayhap," said Jenkyns wrathfully. "Come on, Ned, it will take two to bear her home, poor thing. Don't let the boy see her till we've washed her face—blood always scares children."

"I daresay it's a scratch," Mistress Forrester said, as she filled a pewter pot with water, and followed the shepherd and Ned to the place where Mary lay.

Even Mistress Forrester was moved to pity as she looked down on her stepdaughter's face, and heard her murmur.

“Ambrose! my boy! He is stolen from me. Oh! for pity’s sake, find him.”

“Stolen! stolen! not a bit of it,” Mistress Forrester said. “I warrant he is a-bed and asleep, for he is seldom up till sunrise.”

“He was with me,” Mary gasped, “he was with me, when I fell. I was running from *him*—and—he has stolen him from me.”

“Dear sake! who would care to steal a child? There, there, you are light-headed. Drink a drop of water, and we’ll get you home and a-bed. I’ll plaister the cut with lily leaves and vinegar, and I warrant you’ll be well in a trice.”

They moistened Mary’s lips with water, and Jenkyns sprinkled her forehead; and then Jenkyns, with Ned’s help, raised Mary from the ground and carried her towards the house.

A cry of suppressed agony told of the pain movement caused her, and Mistress Forrester said,—

“Where’s the pain, Mary? Sure you haven’t broke your leg?”

But Mary could not reply. A deadly faintness almost deprived her of the power of speaking.

As they passed through the yard the lamb, which Jenkyns had set down there when he passed through, came trotting towards him, the long thick tail vibrating like a pendulum as it bleated piteously for its mother.

Mary turned her large sorrowful eyes upon it, and whispered,—

“The lost lamb is found. Let it go to its mother. Oh! kind people, find—find my boy, and bring him back to me—to me, his mother.”

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By this time there was great excitement amongst the people employed on the farm, and a knot of men and maidens were standing by the back door, regardless of their mistress's anger that they should dare to idle away a few minutes of the morning.

"Back to your work, you fools!" she said. "Do you think to do any good by staring like a parcel of idiots at Mistress Gifford. Ask the Lord to help her to bear her pain, and go and bring her boy to her, Amice."

But no one had seen the child that morning, and Amice declared he was not in the house.

They carried Mary to her chamber, and laid her down on the low truckle bed, the shepherd moving as gently as he could, and doing his best to prevent her from suffering.

But placing her on the bed again wrung from her a bitter cry, and Jenkyns said,—

"You must e'en get a surgeon to her, Mistress, for I believe she is sorely hurt."

"A surgeon! And, prithee, where am I to find one?"

"As luck will have it," Jenkyns said, "Master Burt from Tunbridge puts up at the hostel every Monday in Penshurst."

"Send Ned down into the village and fetch him, then," Mistress Forrester said, who was now really frightened at Mary's ghastly face, which was convulsed with pain. "Send quick! I can deal with the cut on her forehead, but I can't set a broken limb."

"Stop!" Mary cried, as Jenkyns was leaving the room to despatch Ned on his errand. "Stop!" Then

with a great effort she raised herself to speak in an audible voice. "Hearken! My boy was stolen from me by a tall man in a long black cloak. Search the country, search, and, oh! if you can, find him."

This effort was too much for her, and as poor Jenkyns bent down to catch the feeble halting words, Mary fell back in a deep swoon again, and was, for another brief space, mercifully unconscious of both bodily and mental agony. Hers was literally the stroke which, by the suddenness of the blow, deadens the present sense of pain; that was to come later, and the loss of her boy would bring with it the relief of tears when others had dried theirs and accepted with calmness the inevitable.

CHAPTER VIII.

DEFEAT.

“In one thing only failing of the best—
That he was not as happy as the rest.”

EDMUND SPENSER.

THE court of Queen Elizabeth was well used to witness splendid shows and passages-of-arms, masques, and other entertainments organised by the noblemen chiefly, to whose houses—like Kenilworth—the Queen was often pleased to make long visits.

The Queen always expected to be amused, and those who wished to court her favour took care that no pains should be wanting on their part to please her. Indeed, the courtiers vied with each other in their efforts to win the greatest praise from their sovereign lady, who dearly liked to be entertained in some novel manner.

This visit of the French Ambassadors to London, headed by Francis de Bourbon, was considered a very important event. It was supposed that Elizabeth was really in earnest about the marriage with the Duke of Anjou, whose cause these Frenchmen had been commissioned by their Sovereign to plead. They were also to have a careful eye to his interests in the treaty they were to make with so shrewd a maiden lady as the

Queen of England, who was known always to have the great question of money prominently before her in all her negotiations, matrimonial and otherwise.

The Earl of Arundel, Lord Windsor, Philip Sidney and Fulke Greville undertook to impress the visitors with a magnificent display worthy of the occasion which brought them to London.

In the tilt-yard at Whitehall, nearest to the Queen's windows, a "Fortress of Perfect Beauty" was erected, and the four knights were to win it by force of arms.

All that the ingenuity of the artificers of the time could do was done. The Fortress of Beauty was made of canvas stretched on wooden poles, gaily painted with many quaint devices, and wreathed about with evergreens and garlands, which were suspended from the roof. It was erected on an artificial mound; and, as the day drew near, those who had to control the admission of the hundreds who clamoured to be allowed to be spectators of the tournament, were at their wit's end to gratify the aspirants for good places.

The ladies about the Court were, of course, well provided with seats in the temporary booths erected round the tilt-yard, and the Countess of Pembroke and her following of gentlewomen in attendance occupied a prominent position. Lady Mary Sidney and her youngest son, Thomas, were also present. Robert was in his brother's train. Lady Rich, blazing with diamonds, was the admired of many eyes—upon whose young, fair face might be seen the trace of that unsatisfied longing and discontent with her lot, for which the splendour of her jewels and richness of the lace of her embroidered bodice were but a poor compensation.

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Amongst Lady Pembroke's attendants there was one to whom all the show had the charm of novelty.

Lucy Forrester could scarcely believe that she was actually to be a witness of all the magnificence of which she had dreamed on the hillside above Penshurst. Her young heart throbbed with triumph as she saw Mistress Ratcliffe and Dorothy vainly struggling to gain admittance at one of the entrances, and at last, hustled and jostled, only allowed to stand on the steps of one of the booths by Humphrey's help, who was awaiting the signal from Philip's chief esquire to go and prepare his horse for the passage-of-arms.

Lucy had gone through some troubles that morning with Mistress Crawley, whom she did not find easy to please at any time, and who, seeing Lucy was in favour with the Countess of Pembroke, did her best to prevent her from taking too exalted a view of her own merits.

She had ordered that Lucy, as the youngest of the bower-women, should take a back bench in the booth, where it was difficult to see or to be seen, but Lady Pembroke had over-ruled this by saying,—

“There is room for all in the front row, good Crawley. Suffer Mistress Lucy to come forward.”

And then Lucy, beaming with delight, had a full view of the fortress, and found herself placed exactly opposite the window at which the Queen was to sit with her favourites to watch the show.

“Tell me, I pray you, the name of that grand lady whose jewels are flashing in the sunshine?”

Lucy said this to her companion, who bid her sit as close as she could, and not squeeze her hoop, and take care not to lean over the edge of the booth so as

to obstruct her own view of the people who were rapidly filling up the seats.

"And forsooth, Mistress Forrester, you must not speak in a loud voice. It's country-bred manners to do so."

Lucy pouted, but was presently consoled by a smile from Philip Sidney, who came across the yard to exchange a word with his sister, and to ask if his young brother was able to get a good view.

Lucy was much elated by that recognition, and her companion said in a low voice,—

"You ask who yonder lady is? Watch, now, and I'll tell you." For Philip had, in returning, stopped before the booth where Lady Rich sat, and she had bent forward to speak to him. Only a few words passed, but when Philip had moved away there was a change in Lady Rich's face, and the lines of discontent and the restless glance of her dark eyes, seeking for admiration, were exchanged for a satisfied smile, which had something also of sadness in it.

"That Lady is Lord Rich's wife, and Mr. Sidney's love. He will never look with favour on anyone besides. The pity of it! And," she added in a low voice, "the shame too!"

"But, hush!" as Lucy was about to respond. "We may be heard, and that would anger my lady, who has no cause to love my Lady Rich, and would not care to hear her spoken of in the same breath as Mr. Sidney."

The waiting time for spectacles is apt to grow wearisome; and some of the spectators were yawning, and a few of the elder ladies resigning themselves to a quiet

nap, their heads heavy with the ale of the morning meal, swaying from side to side, and endangering the stiff folds of the ruffs, which made a sort of cradle for their cheeks and chins. Lucy, however, knew nothing of fatigue; she was too much elated with her position, too earnestly employed in scanning the dresses of the ladies, and admiring the grand equipments of the gentlemen, to feel tired.

At length the blast of trumpets announced the coming of the Queen to the balcony before the window whence she was to see the pageant. A burst of applause and loud cries of "God save the Queen" greeted Elizabeth, who, gorgeously arrayed, smiled and bowed graciously to the assembled people. Behind her was the Earl of Leicester, and Lord Burleigh and the French Ambassador at either side, with a bevy of ladies-in-waiting in the background. The large window had a temporary balcony erected before it, and those who occupied it were for a few minutes the centre of observation.

Lucy Forrester had never before had so good a view of the Queen, and her astonishment was great when she saw, with the critical eye of youth, the lady about whose beauty and charms so many sonnets and verses had been written by every rhymester in the land, as well as by the chief poets of the day. It was a generally accepted fact throughout the country, that the Queen was as beautiful as she was wise, and that her charms led captive many a noble suitor, who pined, perhaps in vain, for her favours.

Lucy whispered to her companion,—

"I thought to see a young and fair Queen, and she is old and—"

"Peace, I tell you!" said her companion sharply. "You are a little fool to dare to say that! You had best hold your tongue!"

Lucy ventured at no further remark, and very soon the heralds came riding into the tilt-yard and proclaimed the coming of the four knights who were to carry the Fortress of Beauty by their prowess against those who defended it; and summoned the Queen to surrender her Fortress to the Four Foster Children of Desire.

The Earl of Arundel led the way with Lord Windsor, both magnificently attired, with a large following of attendant esquires. But Lucy's eyes dilated with an admiration that was too deep for words, as Philip Sidney rode into the yard in blue and gilt armour, seated on a splendid horse, on which he sat with graceful ease as it curveted and pranced, perfectly controlled by the skill of its rider. Four spare horses, richly caparisoned, were led behind him by pages, and thirty gentlemen and yeomen, amongst whom were Humphrey and George Ratcliffe, with four trumpeters dressed in cassock coats and caps, Venetian hose of yellow velvet adorned with silver lace, and white buskins. A silver band passing like a scarf over the shoulder and under the arm bore the motto—*Sic nos non nobis*. Lucy had no eyes for anyone but her ideal knight, and Fulke Greville, in his gilded armour, with his followers in gorgeous array, had passed by almost unheeded.

Speeches were made, and songs sung, and then the challengers marched up and down the yard, and at

last proceeded to "run tilt," each in his turn, against an opponent, each running six times. The opponents were numerous, and the four, before nightfall, were seriously discomfited.

The show was over for that day, and the Queen commanded that the tilt should be run again on the following morning, which was Whit-Tuesday. After a great many more speeches and confessions of weariness, the four knights fell to work with such renewed energy that, we are told, what with shivering swords and lusty blows, it was as if the Greeks were alive again, and the Trojan war renewed—ending in the defeat of the Four Foster Children of Desire, who were, as was only probable, beaten in the unequal contest.

The Queen was loud in her praise of the "pleasant sport," which had delighted the gentlemen in whose honour it had been all arranged; and she called up Philip Sidney for especial thanks, and, tapping him on the shoulder, bid him repair to the banqueting-hall and discourse some sweet music on his mandoline, and converse with the French Ambassadors. For, she said, speaking herself in fluent and excellent French,—

"This good Mr. Philip Sidney, I would have you to know, has the command of many foreign tongues, and there are few to match him in Latin and Greek, as well as those languages spoken in our own time in divers countries."

"Ah, madam!" Philip said, "there is one who surpasses not only my poor self in learning, but surpasses also the finest scholars that the world can produce. Need I name that one, gentlemen," he said, with a courtly bow and kneeling as he kissed the Queen's

hand, "for she it is who has to-day been pleased to give, even to us, Four Children of Desire—defeated as we are—the meed of praise, which is, from her, a priceless dower."

This flattery was precisely what Elizabeth hoped for, and she was well pleased that it should be offered in the hearing of those ambassadors, who would, doubtless, repeat it in the ears of the Duke of Anjou.

In reply, one of the soft-spoken Frenchmen said,—

"Mr. Sidney's fame has reached our ears, Madam. We know him to be what you are pleased to call him; nor will we for a moment dispute his assertion that, learned as he is, he must yield the palm to his gracious Sovereign."

A few more flattering speeches were tendered; but a keen observer might have noticed that there was a touch of irony, even of distrust, in the tone, if not in the words, of the ambassadors' chief spokesman.

For if Philip Sidney's fame as a scholar and a statesman had reached France, his fame also as a staunch defender of the Reformed Faith had also reached it, with the report that he had been, a few years before, bold enough to remonstrate with the Queen when the proposal of her marriage with the Duke had been formally made, and that his opposition had been strong enough to turn the scale against it, at the time.

The silence of night had fallen over Whitehall, and those who had won, and those who had been beaten in the tourney were resting their tired, and, in many cases, their bruised limbs, in profound repose, when the

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porter of the quarters assigned to Philip Sidney's gentlemen and esquires was roused from his nap by loud and continued knocking at the gate.

The porter was very wrathful at being disturbed, and looking out at the small iron grating by the side of the gate, he asked,—

“Who goes there?”

“One who wants speech with Master Humphrey Ratcliffe.”

“It will keep till morning, be off; you may bide my time,” and with that the porter shambled back to his seat in a recess of the entrance, and composed himself to sleep again. But the man who sought admittance was not to be so easily discouraged. He began to knock again with the staff in his hand, more loudly than before.

The porter in vain tried to take no further notice, and finding it impossible to resume his sleep, heavy as it was with the strong potations of the previous night, he rose once more, and, going to the grating, poured out a volley of oaths upon the would-be intruder, which was enough to scare away the boldest suitor for admission.

His loud voice, combined with the thundering rap on the heavy oaken gate or door which still continued, roused Humphrey Ratcliffe from his dreams, on the upper floor, and he presently appeared on the stone staircase which led into the outer hall, where the porter kept guard, and said,—

“What is all this commotion about? Who demands admission? Open the gate, and let us see.”

“Open the gate, Master, yourself,” was the rough

reply, "and let in a parcel of murderers or thieves, for all I care. You're welcome."

"Hold your tongue, you knave," Humphrey said; "you are half-drunk now, I warrant," and Humphrey, going to the grating, asked,—

"Who craves admission at this hour of the night?"

"An it please you, Master, it is near cock-crow," was the answer, "and day is breaking. I have ill news for Master Humphrey Ratcliffe, and must deliver my message to his ear."

"Ill news!" Humphrey repeated the words. His thoughts went first to his mother, and then he remembered that she was safe in lodgings with Dorothy and George.

"I am one Ned Barton, cowherd to one Mistress Forrester. I've trudged many a mile at the bidding of Mistress Gifford, who is in a sore plight."

Humphrey did not hesitate now, he drew back the heavy bolts, and turned the huge, rusty key in the lock, and threw open one side of the gate.

"Come in," he said, "and deliver your message."

Ned, in his coarse smock, which was much travel-stained and worn, pulled the lock of red hair which shadowed his forehead, in token of respect, and shuffled into the hall.

He was footsore and weary, and said,—

"By your leave, Master, I would be glad to rest, for I warrant my bones ache."

Humphrey pointed to a bench which was but dimly discernible in the dark hall, lighted only by a thin wick floating in a small pan of oil, and bid Ned seat himself, while he drew a mugful of ale from the barrel, which

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was supposed to keep up the porter's strength and spirits during the night-watch, and put it to Ned's lips.

He drank eagerly, and then said,—

“I've a letter for you, Master, in my pouch, but I was to say you were to keep it to yourself. Mistress Gifford could scarce write it, for she is sick, and no wonder. Look here, Master, I'd tramp twice twenty miles to serve her, and find the boy.”

“Find the boy! You speak in riddles.”

Ned nodded till his abundant red hair fell in more than one stray lock over his sunburnt, freckled face.

“Are there eavesdroppers at hand?” he asked.

The porter was snoring loudly, but Humphrey felt uncertain whether he was feigning sleep, or had really resumed his broken slumber. He therefore bid the boy follow him upstairs, first replacing bolt and bar, to make all secure till the morning.

When he reached his room, which was up more than one flight of the winding stone stairs, Ned stumbling after him, he struck a light with a flint and kindled a small lamp, which hung from an iron hook in the roof.

“Throw yourself on that settle, my good fellow; but give me the letter first. When I have read it, you shall tell me all you know.”

The letter was written on thin parchment, and was scarcely legible, blotted, as it was, with tears, and the penmanship irregular and feeble.

“To Master Humphrey Ratcliffe—My Good Friend,—
This comes from one nearly distraught with grief of mind and sickness of body. My boy, my boy! They have stolen him from me. Can you find him for me?

He is in the hands of Jesuits—it may be at Douay—I dare say no more. I cannot say more. Good Ned, Heaven bless him, will find you out, and give you this. Pray to God for me. He alone can bind the broken heart of one who is yours, in sore need.

“M. G.

“I lost him this day se’nnight; it is as a hundred years to me. Tears are my meat. God’s hand is heavy upon me.”

Humphrey read and re-read the letter, and again and again pressed it passionately to his lips.

“Find him! Find her boy; yes, God helping me, I will track him out, alive or dead.”

Then he turned to Ned,—

“Now, tell me all you know of this calamity.”

Ned told the story in a few simple words. The black man had been skulking about Penshurst for some time. He had scared Mistress Lucy, and the boy had seen him near the house. Mistress Gifford had gone out early to look after the shepherd, who was seeking a lost lamb, and the black man had come out of a hollow. Then Mistress Gifford had run with all her might, and, worse luck, she stumbled and fell in a swoon, and when Jenkyns found her she had come out of it, but was moaning with pain, and grieving for the boy.

“And no wonder,” Ned said; “there’s not a soul at the farm that didn’t think a mighty deal of that child. He was a plague sometimes, I’ll warrant, but—” and Ned drew his sleeve across his eyes, and his low

guttural voice faltered, as he said,—“Folks must be made of stone if they don’t feel fit to thrash that popish devil for kidnapping him, and going near to break Madam Gifford’s heart, who is a saint on earth.”

“You are a good fellow,” Humphrey said fervently. “Now, take off those heavy boots and rest, while I tax my brains, till I decide what is best to do.”

With a mighty kick Ned sent his rough boots flying, one after the other, across the room, and then, without more ado, curled up his ungainly figure on the settle, and before Humphrey could have believed it possible, he was snoring loudly, his arm thrown under his head, and his tawny red locks in a tangled mass, spread upon the softest cushion on which the cowboy had ever rested.

Humphrey Ratcliffe paced the chamber at intervals till daybreak, and was only longing for action, to be able to do something to relieve Mary’s distress—to scour the country till he found a trace of the villain, and rescue the boy from his clutches.

This must be his immediate aim; but to do this he must gain leave from his chief.

The tournament was over, but the Queen would most certainly require Mr. Sidney’s attendance at Hampton Court Palace, whither it was rumoured she was shortly to go in state, in the royal barge, with the French Ambassador.

Humphrey grew feverishly anxious for the time when he could see Mr. Sidney, and hailed the noises in the courtyard and the voices of the grooms, who were rubbing down the tired horses after the conflicts of the

previous day, and examining their hurts received in the fray, which were in some cases very severe.

Mr. Sidney's rooms were reached by another staircase, and as the big clock of the palace struck five, Humphrey went down into the porter's hall and inquired of one of the attendants if Mr. Sidney was stirring.

"He isn't stirring, for he hasn't been a-bed," was the answer.

"Then I shall gain admittance?"

"Most like," was the reply, with a prolonged yawn.

"Those are lucky who can slumber undisturbed, whether a-bed or up. Yesterday's show fell hard on those who had to work at it."

"I hear you let in a vagrant last night, Master Ratcliffe. The porter saith if harm comes of it he won't take the blame. Most like a rascally Jesuit come to spy out some ways to brew mischief."

"A harmless country lout is not likely to brew mischief," Humphrey said sharply. "The man came on urgent business, in which none here but myself have concern," and then he crossed to the door leading to the apartments occupied by Mr. Sidney and Sir Fulke Greville.

Humphrey Ratcliffe had not to wait for admittance to Philip Sidney's room.

He answered the tap at the door with a ready "Enter," and Humphrey found him seated before a table covered with papers, the morning light upon his gold-coloured hair, and on his beautiful face.

Humphrey Ratcliffe stopped short on the threshold of the door before closing it behind him, and how often,

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in the years that were to come, did Philip Sidney's figure, as he saw it then, return to him as a vivid reality from which time had no power to steal its charm.

Philip looked up with a smile, saying,—

“Well, my good Humphrey, you are astir early.”

“And you, sir, have been astir all night!”

“Sleep would not come at my bidding, Humphrey, and it is in vain to court her. She is a coy mistress, who will not be caught by any wiles till she comes of her own sweet will. But is aught amiss, Humphrey, that you seek me so soon? Hero, my good horse, came out of the fray untouched. I assured myself of that ere I came hither last night.”

“There is nothing wrong with Hero, sir, that I know of. I dare to seek you for counsel in a matter which causes me great distress.”

Philip Sidney had many great gifts, but perhaps none bound his friends and dependants more closely to him, nor won their allegiance more fully, than the sympathy with which he entered into all their cares and joys, their sorrows or their pleasures.

Immediately, as Humphrey told his story, he was listening with profound attention, and Humphrey's burden seemed to grow lighter as he felt it shared with his chief.

“You know her, sir! You can believe how sore my heart is for her. In all the sorrows which have well nigh crushed her, this boy has been her one consolation and joy, and he is stolen from her.”

“Yes,” Philip Sidney said, “I do know Mistress Gifford, and have always pleased myself with the thought

that she would put aside the weeds of widowhood and make you happy some day, good Humphrey."

"Nay, sir; she has given me too plainly to understand this is impossible. She is as a saint in Heaven to me. I love her with my whole heart, and yet—yet—I feel she is too far above me, and that I shall never call her mine."

"Well, well, let us hope you may yet attain unto your heart's desire, nor have it ever denied, as is God's will for me. But now, as to the boy—it puzzles me why any man should kidnap a child of these tender years. What can be the motive?"

"I know not, sir, unless it be the greedy desire of the Papists to gain over, and educate in their false doctrines and evil practices, children likely to serve their ends. Mistress Gifford's husband was, so it is said, a Papist from the first moment that he married her, but hid it from her, and played his part well."

"I do not doubt it. While in the service of my Uncle Leicester, it was his policy to profess the Reformed Faith. Failing to obtain what he wanted, he threw off disguise, and, as I understand, after an intrigue with another man's wife, had a fierce fight with the injured husband, so deadly that both lost their lives in the fray."

"Some said this Gifford, fearing disgrace, had left the country, others that he died. Mistress Gifford must believe the last to be true or she would not, methinks, have clothed herself in the weeds of widowhood."

"But now, my good Humphrey, you would fain have leave to prosecute your inquiries. God speed you

in them, and may they be successful. Mistress Gifford's reference to Douay makes me think she may have some notion, to connect this centre of the Papists with the disappearance of her boy. At anyrate, see her, and, if it is advisable for you to repair to Douay, go, but beware you are not entrapped by any of those Jesuits' snares."

"I am loth to leave you, sir," Humphrey said, "yet I feel bound to do what in me lies to rescue this boy. A goodly child he is, full of spirit, and, though wild at times as a young colt, obedient to his mother. Alack!" Humphrey continued, "his poor bereft mother. Would to God I knew how to comfort her."

It was then arranged that Humphrey should set off, without loss of time, for Penshurst, stopping at Tunbridge on the road to institute inquiries there.

George Ratcliffe was also returning home with several horses which had been over-strained in the tourney of the day before, and both brothers left London together, with Ned on the baggage horse with the serving-man, before noon, George scarcely less heavy-hearted than Humphrey, and too much absorbed in his own troubles to be alive to his brother's. What was the loss of little Ambrose when compared with the utter hopelessness he felt about Lucy.

George rode moodily by his brother's side, scarcely heeding what he saw, and torturing himself with the careless indifference with which Lucy had treated him.

He had asked her to come to his mother's lodgings, and she had refused, saying,—

"You have Mistress Dorothy here, you cannot want

me. Besides, I am under orders, and Crawley must be obeyed."

Then, in the intervals of the tournament, George had seen the eyes of several gallants directed towards Lady Pembroke's booth, and heard one man say,—

"There is a pretty maiden in the Countess's following. I lay a wager I will get a smile from her."

"Not you," was the reply; "she has eyes for no one but Mr. Sidney. She follows him with admiring glances; no one else has a chance."

While George was inwardly fuming against the two men, one rode up to the booth, and bowing low, till his head nearly swept his horse's neck, he presented a posy, tied with a blue riband, to Lucy, who smiled and blushed with delight, quite indifferent to the scowl on George's face, as he sat grimly on his horse at the further end of the tilting-yard, where he was stationed, with several others, with a relay of horses in case fresh ones should be wanted by the combatants.

Unversed in the ways of the Court, George did not know that it was the habit of gallants to present posies, as they would have said, at the shrine of beauty. From the Maiden Queen upon the throne to the pretty bower-woman at her needle, this homage was expected, and received almost as a matter of course. But George, like many other men of his age, had his especial divinity, and could not endure to see other worshippers at her feet.

All these memories of the two days' tournament occupied George Ratcliffe during his ride by his brother's side, and kept up a sort of accompaniment to the measured trot of the horses as they were brought

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up in the rear by the servants in charge of them. After a long silence, George said,—

“Did you see Mistress Lucy ere we started, Humphrey, to let her know of her sister’s trouble.”

“No,” was the answer. “No; I could not get permission to do so, but I sent a letter by the hand of one of Lord Pembroke’s esquires, which would tell her of her sister’s trouble.”

“It was an ill day for me,” George said, “when Lucy Forrester came to the Court. I have lost her now.”

“Nay now, George, do not be a craven and lose heart. You may win yet. There is time, and to spare, before you.”

Thereupon George gave his sturdy roan steed a sharp cut with the whip, which surprised him greatly. He resented the indignity by plunging from side to side of the rugged road, and by his heavy gambols sending the other horses off in a variety of antics.

When the horses were quieted down again, Humphrey said, laughing,—

“Poor old fellow! he doesn’t understand why his master should punish him for the offences of Mistress Lucy Forrester.” Then, more seriously, “My own heart is heavy within me, but I try to ease the burden by doing what I can to relieve the pain of her whom I love. Action is the best cure for heart sickness.”

“But action is impossible for me, Humphrey. I have only to endure. Here am I, riding back to our home to eat the bread of disappointment, leaving her, for whom I would gladly die, to the temptations of the Court. She will listen to the wooing of some gallant, and my Lady Pembroke will abet it, and then —”

"Then bear it like a man, George; nor break your heart for a maiden, when there are, I doubt not, many who are worthier and—"

"That's fine talking," poor George said wrathfully. "What if I were to tell you there are many worthier than the widow of Ambrose Gifford. There are some who say that she was not—"

Humphrey's eyes had an angry light in them as he turned them full on his brother.

"Not a word more, George, of *her*. I will not brook it; her name is sacred to me as the name of any saint in Heaven."

George felt he dare say no more, and, after another silence, Humphrey asked,—

"When does our mother propose to return?"

"Not for a month. She has made friends with a draper in the Chepe, who is a relation of our father's. He has a little, ill-favoured son, and I think I saw signs of his wishing to win Dorothy Ratcliffe's favour. I would to Heaven he may do so, and then I shall at any rate have peace and quiet, and be free from hearing my mother lay plans of what she will do when I bring Dorothy as mistress of Hillside. Marry Dorothy, forsooth! I pity any man who is tied to that shrew for life."

"Even the ill-favoured cousin you speak of in the Chepe," Humphrey said, laughing in spite of himself. "Nay, George, bear yourself as a man, and I dare to say little Mistress Lucy will come round to your wishes."

"I would that I could hope, but despair has seized me ever since the day of that tourney. Did you ever see anyone look fairer than she did that day seated

amongst all the grand folks? There was not one to compare with her, and I caught words in several quarters which showed me I am not wrong in my estimate of her."

"Ah, George," his brother said, "we are all wont to think our own idols are beyond compare; it is a common illusion—or delusion. But we are nearing Tunbridge. Here we must part, for I must tarry here to pursue inquiries, while you proceed homewards. The horses must be baited, and we must get some refreshments at the hostel. It may be that in the inn kitchen I may pick up some information that may be of service. I shall not ride to Penshurst till nightfall, or may be the morrow, but I must confide a letter to the care of that trusty Ned who I see coming up behind us but slowly on yonder sturdy steed."

Humphrey dismounted in the yard of the hostel and gave orders to his groom, while George went into the kitchen and bid the hostess spread a good meal for the whole party.

Humphrey waited outside till the baggage horse, on which Ned was seated, came up.

Poor Ned was entirely unused to travel on horseback, and had found jolting and bumping on the sturdy mare's back over the rough road far more painful than his long march of the previous day and night. He was the butt of the other servants, who laughed more loudly than politely as he was set on his legs in the yard.

He was so stiff from the confined position, that he staggered and would have fallen, amidst the boisterous jeers of the spectators, had not Humphrey caught him, and, trying to steady him, said,—

"Peace, ye varlets; this good fellow has done me a real service, and deserves better at your hands than gibes and scoffs. Come hither, Ned. I have yet something further for you to do for me."

Ned followed Humphrey with halting steps, shaking first one leg and then another, as if to assure himself that they still belonged to him.

"I'll do all you ask, Master," Ned said, "but ride a-horse-back. I will walk fifty miles sooner. My legs are full of pins and needles, and it will take a deal of shaking and rubbing before I can call 'em my own again."

Humphrey could not resist laughing, for Ned's face was comical in its contortions, as he stamped his feet and rubbed his shins with muttered exclamations that, as long as his name was Ned, he would never get upon a horse's back again.

"You've got a fit of the cramp," Humphrey said, "it will soon pass. Now, after you have had a good meal, take this letter which is tied and sealed, and put it into the hands of Mistress Gifford. It will tell her all I can yet tell her in answer to the letter you brought me. At least she will know by it that I will do my utmost to serve her, and find her son."

Ned took the letter with his large brown fingers, and, putting it into the pouch in the breast of his smock, he said,—

"I'll carry it safe, Master, and I'll be off at once."

"Not till you have broken your long fast in the kitchen of the hostel."

"An it please you, Master, I would sooner be off, if I get a cake to eat on the way, and a draft of ale be-

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fore I start; that will serve me. Do not order me, I pray you, to sit down with those gibing villains—no, nor order me, kind sir, to mount a horse again. If I live to be three score, I pray Heaven I may never sit a-horseback again.”

CHAPTER IX.

ACROSS THE FORD.

“Farewell to you! my hopes, my wonted waking dreams,
Farewell, sometimes enjoyed joy, eclipsed are thy beams.
Farewell self-pleasing thoughts! which quietness brings forth,
And farewell friendship’s sacred league! uniting minds of worth.”

SIR F. GREVILLE, 1591.

LUCY FORRESTER was mending the lace of one of Lady Pembroke’s ruffs which had been torn at the edge on the previous day, when a page brought in Humphrey’s letter, saying, “For Mistress Forrester.”

“Hand it hither,” Mistress Crawley said. “It will keep till that lace is mended, and I’d have you to know, Mistress Lucy, my lady is very careful that there should be no billets passing between the young gentlewomen of her household and idle gallants about the Court. A pack of rubbish is in that letter, I’ll warrant; some rhymes about your bright eyes and cherry cheeks, or some such stuff.”

“If you please, Madam, I desire to have my letter, and, if you will not give it to me, I will go to my lady and tell her you refuse to let me have it.”

"You little sauce-box! Do you think my lady has nought to do but attend to the whimsies of chits like you? Go on with your work. Do you hear?"

Lucy was burning with indignation, and, moreover, her curiosity was awakened to know who had written to her, and what were the contents of the letter.

The spirit which had rebelled against her stepmother now asserted itself, and she pushed back the stool on which she was sitting with such violence that it fell with a crash on the floor, and, as it fell, knocked against the spindle at which another of the maidens was sitting, and the thread snapped in two.

In the confusion which ensued Lucy escaped, and went into the gallery which ran round the house, and meeting Mr. Sidney, she stopped short.

"Whither away, Mistress Lucy? My sister wishes to see you."

"And I wish to see my lady," Lucy said, her breast heaving with suppressed excitement. "I was running to seek her."

Mistress Crawley now appeared, and, seizing Lucy by the shoulder, exclaimed,—

"You impudent child! How dare you stop Mr. Sidney? Return at once, or I'll have you dismissed."

"Gently, good Mistress Crawley," Philip Sidney said. "It was I who was seeking Mistress Lucy. Allow me to take her to the Countess's apartment, where I fear ill news awaits her concerning her family at Penshurst."

Philip Sidney's voice and manner had almost a magic power.

Mistress Crawley begged his pardon, nor would she wish to interfere with her lady's orders. She would

take another opportunity of reporting Mistress Forrester's conduct to her. And, with a profound curtesy to Philip, and an angry glance at Lucy, she retreated from the field to renew her attack at a more convenient season.

"Oh! sir," Lucy began, "a letter was brought for me, and Mistress Crawley would not suffer me to have it. I was angry—" and Lucy cast down her eyes, the long lashes wet with tears; she could not meet the calm, grave face looking down on her.

Yet through all, there was the sense of infinite delight that Mr. Sidney was her friend, and that Mistress Crawley was discomfited.

"My poor child," he said, "I am sorry for you, if, as I think, the letter contains news of your sister's illness and of her great trouble."

"Mary, is it Mary who is sick, sir?"

"Yes, and worse than that, her boy has been stolen from her."

"Then I know who has done it," Lucy exclaimed. "I know it was that dreadful man with the cruel eyes who scared me almost to death a month ago. He said he wanted to see Ambrose, and now he has stolen him."

They were at the door of Lady Pembroke's room by this time, and Philip Sidney drew aside the over arras hanging on it to let Lucy pass in. To her disappointment he said,—

"I will leave you now to the Countess for comfort and counsel," and then the arras fell, and Lucy was called by Lady Pembroke to the further end of the room, where she was sitting with parchment and pen before her.

“An it please you, Madam, I cannot put up with Mistress Lucy’s impudence. There’ll be no law and order amongst the young gentlewomen, over whom you are pleased to set me, if this young woman is to put me at defiance. Vanity and thinking of nought but gew-gaws and finery and looking out for admiration, don’t go to make a bower-woman such as a noble lady like yourself might wish to have in her household. I would humbly say to you, my lady, that I am not the one to put up with sauce and impudence from a little

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country-bred maid you are pleased to take under your patronage."

"Dear Crawley," Lady Pembroke said, "Mistress Forrester is ill at ease at this moment; the news from her home may well cause her dismay and grief; leave her to me, and I will let you hear later to what conclusion I have arrived."

Mistress Crawley curtseyed again even more profoundly than before, and, as she left the room, murmured something about "favourite," which did not reach Lady Pembroke's ear, or, if it did, passed unheeded.

Lady Pembroke was sweet and gentle in her manner to all who served her, but she was not weakly indulgent. Although her heart went out in pity towards poor Lucy, whom she had watched on the previous day, in the full flush of delight at her first taste of Court pageantry, and had seen, with some uneasiness, that her beauty had attracted many eyes, she said gravely,—

"Try to stop weeping, Lucy, and let us think what it will be best to do. It is well always to look at duty first, and strive after its performance, with God's help; and I think it will be your duty to return to your sister in her distress."

"And leave you for ever, Madam!" Lucy exclaimed passionately.

"Nay, I did not say as much; but, my child, if you return to my household, it must be understood that you be submissive to Mistress Crawley—an old and tried friend and servant—who commands respect, and must have it rendered her."

"Oh, Madam, I will, I will be submissive, only do not send me quite away."

It did not escape Lady Pembroke's notice that Lucy's tears and distress were more for herself and her disappointment than for her sister. Lucy had never learned a lesson of unselfishness, and she had thought chiefly of her own pleasure, and how she could escape from the life at Ford Manor. And now that she had escaped, now that a bright future had opened before her, suddenly that future was clouded, and she was to return whence she came, and would, doubtless, have to bear the gibes of her stepmother, who had, at parting, said, "She would be back in a trice, like a bad penny, returned as worthless."

A prophecy fulfilled sooner than she had expected.

All this time Humphrey's letter had not been opened, and Lady Pembroke said,—

"Let us know Master Ratcliffe's wishes; he is, as I know, a good friend to your sister."

"He will sure tell me to go back, but I cannot find little Ambrose; and I am not skilled in nursing the sick, Madam, I know. Goody Pearse, in the village, would tend Mary better. I love Mary. I love her dearly; and I grieve about Ambrose, but—"

"But you love yourself better than either your sister or her boy," Lady Pembroke said. "Now, cut the string of that letter and let me know its contents."

Lucy did as she was bid. Something in Lady Pembroke's grave manner made her feel that she was not pleased with her, and, of all things, she longed to win favour with her—Mr. Sidney's sister!

There were only a few words on the piece of folded parchment.

"Mistress Lucy, you must crave leave of my lady, the Countess of Pembroke, to return to Ford Manor. Your sister is in sore distress—her boy lost, and she is lying sick and sad. Hasten to get leave to return on the morrow with the gentlewomen and esquires, who are to reach Penshurst with my Lady Sidney and Master Thomas. I am now, by leave of Mr. Sidney, starting on the quest for your nephew Ambrose Gifford. Pray God I may find him.

"Yours to command, and in haste.

"HUMPHREY RATCLIFFE."

"This letter from so wise a gentleman leaves no alternative," Lady Pembroke said, as she scanned its contents, and then handed it back to Lucy.

"Orders shall be given for your joining the retinue which sets off for Penshurst the morrow. Meantime, Lucy, return to your duties, and crave pardon of Mistress Crawley for your insubordination."

"And I may return? Oh! Madam, I pray you, say I may return to you. Do not cast me off."

"I shall be at Wilton for some months, and thither I may send for you, if, as I trust, you will not be needed at Ford Manor."

Lucy still lingered.

"Forgive me, Madam; do not dismiss me without forgiveness."

"Nay, surely, dear child," Lady Pembroke said. "I would fain see you happy, and content with the lot appointed you by God. There are manifold temptations in this world for us all. We need grasp the hand of

One who will not fail to lead us safely in prosperity, and by the waters of comfort in adversity. Seek Him, Lucy, with your whole heart, and I pray God to bless you."

Lucy kissed the hand held out to her with passionate fervour, and then went back to do Lady Pembroke's bidding.

The expedition to Hampton Court was the topic of conversation amongst the ladies of the household.

Several of the elder ones were to accompany Lady Pembroke in the earl's barge; and Lucy heard the glowing accounts of the splendour of the entertainment there, related in triumphant tones by those who were fortunate enough to be selected to accompany the Countess.

They dilated on the theme with some satisfaction, as poor Lucy sat at her lace-mending, too proud to show her mortification, and yet inwardly chafing against the hard fate, which had prevented her from being one of the party.

"Better never to have tasted the sweets of a bright, gay life, than be so suddenly snatched from it," she thought. But her better self asserted itself as she thought of Mary's distress in the loss of Ambrose.

For Lucy had a better self, and she was not without higher aims. She possessed natural gifts which, though perhaps inferior to her sister's, only wanted cultivation. She eagerly devoured any books that came in her way; and she had a keen perception of all that was beautiful—perhaps it is safer to say, all that was grand and imposing.

She loved to dream of herself as the lady of some

fine house, surrounded by all that wealth and rank could give.

The ideal knight who was to endow her with this splendour was partly ideal, but he took the form of Mr. Sidney. She dare scarcely acknowledge this to herself. He was set on high, so far above her, it is true; yet he was never too high above her to forget her presence. His smile was a guerdon which she craved to win; the glance of his grave, beautiful eyes thrilled through her; the sound of his voice was music, stirring within her an answering chord, the echo of which was ever sweet and sweeter every time it was awakened.

It was, she felt sure, by his kind offices she had been placed in Lady Pembroke's household. And did he not seem sad—sorry for her—when Mistress Crawley pursued her in the gallery? Did he not call her "My poor child!" looking down at her with that light of sympathy in his eyes which seemed at the moment to compensate for all else?

Perhaps unconsciously to himself, Philip Sidney touched the hearts of many a fair dame and youthful beauty about the Court of Queen Elizabeth. Indeed, we know it to have been so, and that the charm he exercised was as subtle as it was irresistible. This charm increased year by year, and perhaps never was greater than at the time of which we are writing, when the struggle within—a struggle in which he was to come out the victor—gave a pathetic earnestness to his manner, and quickened his sympathies for every kind and degree of sorrow or disappointment.

It was as poor little Lucy said: "He was not too high to stoop to care for her, or for others."

In the early morning of the next day Lucy stood disconsolately in the courtyard of Lord Pembroke's city house watching the packing of the baggage, and awaiting the orders of the gentleman who was Master Thomas Sidney's tutor, and was in command for the journey.

All was in the bustle of departure, and Lucy felt that no one cared on which pillion she was to ride, nor where her own modest packages were to be stowed.

She wore a scarlet riding-robe, with a hood which was lined with white taffeta. It fell back, and made a background to her shining hair, and defined the outline of her small, well-shaped head as she leaned against the doorway in listless dejection, which was a contrast indeed to her bright, sparkling mood as she bent over the edge of the booth at the tournament.

A sharp altercation was going on between two of the servants, each wishing to have the honour of taking Lady Mary Sidney's youngest son on his pillion.

Presently the boy himself appeared in his black velvet riding suit, booted and spurred, his red-gold locks—the true Sidney badge—falling over his shoulders from under the stiff, pointed cap which shaded his forehead.

"I am to ride alongside of you, not on the pillion like a babe. Peace! I tell you, Mr. Philip saith so. I am to ride Joan, the black mare, Master Paynter saith it is Mr. Philip's order."

"Philip," the boy said, springing towards his brother who now came into the yard, "Philip, do not let them treat me as an infant."

Thomas Sidney was very small for his age, and was

treated as youngest children often are treated by the elders of a family, as if he were much younger than his years.

His delicacy appealed particularly to his brother Philip, who was always ready to stand his friend, when his elder brother Robin was inclined to exercise a boyish tyranny over him.

"Yes, forsooth, Thomas, you shall ride old Joan. Come, let me see you mount. That is it, spring into the saddle; nay, do not take the rein so slackly, and settle firmly in the saddle, nor use the stirrup for support. A man should be able to ride with nothing but himself to trust to for a safe seat."

Thomas was triumphant, and resisted his governess's attempts to throw a cape over his shoulders, saying,—

"The wind was in the east, and would be like to bite their heads off when they turned into the country."

But Thomas threw off the wrap with an impatient gesture, and, in falling, it hit the good woman on the face.

"Ask pardon at once, Thomas," Philip said sternly; "nor forget the manners of a gentleman, while you aspire to ride as one."

The colour rose to the boy's fair face, and, stooping from the saddle, he said,—

"I am sorry I was rude, Mistress Margery, but oh! I hate to be treated as a babe."

Mistress Margery was easily mollified. She conspired with the rest of the family to spoil the boy, of whom it was said that he resembled his sister Ambrozia, who died of wasting sickness and was buried at Ludlow.

But Thomas had a brave spirit if his body was weak, and to all the refinement of his race he added indomitable courage and a perseverance which surmounted what seemed insuperable barriers.

When the avant-couriers had ridden off, Philip turned to Lucy.

"On which horse are you to ride, Mistress Forrester? Let me lift you to your place."

Lucy was trembling with joy that Mr. Sidney should care for her comfort, and, as we all know, joy lies very near the fount of tears.

She dare scarcely trust herself to speak, as she heard Mr. Sidney call a groom to bring up the grey horse, Prince, for Mistress Forrester.

"Poor old Prince!" Philip said, stroking the horse's neck, who knew his hand and bowed his head in acknowledgment, "he has been a trusty servant, and will carry you safely, I know. But bring hither another cushion for the pillion," he called to an attendant, "and put a package below, for Mistress Forrester's feet to rest upon."

Then he lifted Lucy to her place, saying, as he did so,—

"Methinks Prince will not complain of the burden he has to carry to-day, it is but a feather's weight. See, place your feet on this roll, and let me cover them with the haircloth—so; does that suit you?"

The groom was about to take his place on the side of the pillion nearest the horse's head, when he remembered he had forgotten to fill the powder flask, for no horseman ever ventured on the Queen's highway

without abundant supply for the musket, which lay across the saddle bow.

The delay caused by this gave Mr. Sidney time to say,—

“Heaven grant you may find Mistress Gifford in better case than we fear. You do well to go to her, and comfort her; commend me to her, and say Humphrey Ratcliffe has my freely-given permission to scour the country to find her lost boy. He will do so if he is to be found, and it will be a double grace if he does, for we may be able to unearth some of these foxy Jesuits who are lying in wait in every hole and corner.”

Then, as Lucy did not speak, Philip laid his hand gently on hers as he leaned against the horse, with one arm caressing his old favourite's neck.

“Smile on me before you set off, Mistress Lucy, nor look so doleful. The clouds will clear away, I doubt not, and you will return to my sister, the Countess, to be blythe and happy in learning all Mistress Crawley would fain teach you of handicraft, and still more, all my sister can instruct you in, for she is ever ready to give out the treasures which she has stored up in her brain and heart.”

And now the groom appeared, and mounted to his place, and still Lucy could not find any words.

“God speed you in your journey,” was Philip's good-bye, and Lucy could only murmur a few half-inaudible words, as she looked down on the true knight who filled her girlish dreams, and to whom there never was, and never could be, any rival.

And as the steady-going Prince footed it with even steps over the stones, and trotted along the somewhat

rugged roads on the way to Tunbridge, Lucy tormented herself with her folly in never telling Mr. Sidney in so many words how grateful she was to him.

“Fool that I was!” she thought. “And he so tender and careful for my comfort. What a poor idiot I must have seemed! Yet, sure, I must find favour in his eyes, or he would not have wrapt the cloth so deftly round my feet. Oh, is he not noble and beautiful beyond all men who ever lived? I hear them say the Queen calls him ‘her Philip’ and ‘her bright gem,’ and that he is the wisest statesman, and grandest poet and finest scholar of the age, and yet he is not too great to be good to me—little Lucy Forrester. And it may be I shall never see him again—never return to Lady Pembroke—live up on that hill all my days, and get as stupid and dull as the old brindled cow that stares with big, dull eyes straight before her, and sees nought, nor cares for nought but to chew her food.

“Alack! I am right sorry for Mary’s grief. But I wish, if Ambrose was to be stolen, she had not fallen sick, so that I must needs go and tend her. I am a selfish hussy to feel this—selfish and hard-hearted! But, oh, was ever anyone more grievously disappointed than I am. A few short, bright days, and then back, back to the old, dreary life. Still, I am young; yes, and I am fair too. I know it, and I may yet be happy.”

Lucy’s meditations continued in this strain, in alternate fears and hopes, for some time.

The cavalcade stopped at intervals at wayside hostels to bait the horses, and to refresh the travellers with draughts of ale and cider. One of these potations had a soporific effect on Lucy, and, after drinking

it, she became oblivious of jolts and stoppages, of the fair country through which she passed, and was wrapped in profound slumber, her head resting against the broad back of the servant who held the reins, and urged on old Prince's somewhat slow steps by a succession of monotonous sounds, which now and again broke into the refrain of a song, one of the ballads familiar to Kentish men, and handed down from father to son for many generations.

Humphrey had reached Ford Manor late on the previous evening. He had ridden hard and fast to Tunbridge, and had heard from Dorothy Ratcliffe's father that the Papists' colony was supposed to be broken up, and that they had escaped to Southampton, and taken ship for France.

Two priests had been seized and thrown into prison at Canterbury, and this was supposed to have caused the dispersion of their followers, who had evaded pursuit, and were now thought to be beyond the reach of their persecutors. But neither from his old uncle, Edgar Ratcliffe, nor from any other source could Humphrey glean any information which might throw light on the disappearance of little Ambrose Gifford.

Nor did the intelligence of his loss seem greatly to affect the old man, nor indeed to be of any interest to the few people at Tunbridge of whom Humphrey made inquiries.

They were far more anxious to hear news from the Court, and of the tournament, and whether Mr. Sidney had won fresh laurels, and if the Queen was really going to wed with a Popish prince. This was what the

Papists built their hopes upon, and then it would be their turn to trample on the Protestants.

As Humphrey rode through Penshurst, the village was wrapt in profound repose, for in those times people went to bed and rose with the sun. Artificial light was scarcely known in the farms and homesteads of country districts, and there was only one twinkling light in the window of the hostel in the street to show belated travellers that if they desired shelter and rest they might find it there.

Humphrey rode slowly as he got nearer his destination, feeling reluctance to be the bearer of no good news to one, who he knew was eagerly looking for him.

The waters of the little Medway were low, for the season had been unusually dry, and Humphrey's horse knew the ford well, and easily stepped over it, his hoofs making a dull splash in the rippling stream.

The stars were bright overhead and a crescent moon gave a silvery light. The stillness was profound. At the entrance of the lane leading to Ford Manor the horse stopped short; he evidently wanted to go to his own stable on the crest of the hill.

In that momentary pause Humphrey turned in the saddle, and, looking back, saw the dark outline of the grand old home of the Sidneys and the dark masses of the stately trees which surround it, clear cut against the sky, in which the moon hung like a silver lamp.

The peace which reigned seemed to strike him as a sharp contrast with the turmoil and noise of the city he had lately left. The Court, so full of heart-burnings and jealousies and strivings to win a higher place in

the favour of those who were in favour with the Queen. The image of him who was, perhaps, at that time Elizabeth's chief favourite rose before him, and he thought how far happier he would be to live, apart from Court favour and rivalries, in the stately home which was the pride, not only of the Sidneys themselves, but of everyone of their tenants and dependents on their wide-stretching domain. For Humphrey could not hide from himself that his chief was often sad at heart, and that sometimes, in uncontrollable weariness, he would say that he would fain lead a retired life in his beloved Penshurst. His moods were, it is true, variable, and at times he was the centre of everything that was bright and gay at Court, sought after as one who could discourse sweetest music, the most graceful figure in the dance, the most accomplished poet who could quickly improvise a verse in praise of his Queen, or a rhyme to commemorate some feat of arms at joust or tourney, like that of the preceding day.

Humphrey Ratcliffe thought that he held the solution of his Master's alternations of sadness and cheerfulness, and, as he rode up to the Manor, he sighed as he remembered Philip Sidney's words.

"Let us hope you may attain your heart's desire, nor have it ever denied you, as is God's will for me."

"Denied to me also, but yet I have a hope, Mr. Sidney cannot have; no impassable barrier rises between me and Mary. If I find her boy I may reap my reward."

At the sound of the horse's feet the casement above the porch was opened, and a woman's head was thrust out,

"Who goes there?"

"It is I, Humphrey Ratcliffe. I have an errand to Mistress Gifford."

"She is sick, and can't hear aught to-night. It is near midnight. Go your way, and return in the morning, Master Ratcliffe."

Then there was a pause, the woman's head was withdrawn, and Humphrey's ear, quickened by love, heard Mary's voice in pathetic pleading. Presently the head re-appeared.

"Mistress Gifford says, 'Do you bring news?'"

"I would fain see her, if possible. I cannot speak of such matters here."

"Then you must wait till the morrow, nor parley any longer."

The casement was shut with a sharp click, and there was nothing left for Humphrey but to pursue his way to his own home, whither George—who had parted from him at Tunbridge—and his servants had preceded him earlier in the day.

Mary Gifford lay sleepless and restless all through the long hours of the night, watching for the dawn. She longed, and yet half dreaded her meeting with Humphrey. She felt so utterly weak and broken-hearted, so forlorn and deserted—what if he again urged his suit!—what if she had now to tell him what had been at their last interview only a probability, and was now a certainty! Her husband was no vague shadowy personality; he was alive and strong, to work for her the greatest evil that could befall her in stealing her boy from her.

When Mistress Forrester came in, on her way to

the dairy, to see how it fared with Mary, she found her, to her surprise, dressed, while Goody Pearse was snoring peacefully on the pallet bed, where Ambrose had slept near his mother.

"Dear heart! Mary Gifford, what do you mean by getting up like this? I thought, forsooth, you were so sick you had need of a nurse, to take a few more shillings out of my pocket, and here you are at five o'clock, up and spry. Well-a-day, I never did come to the bottom of you. Deep waters, they say, make no noise."

Mary had braced herself to bear anything and everything, and was strangely unmoved by her stepmother's innuendoes, of which she took no notice, and only said, in a gentle voice,—

"Is Ned astir yet?"

"I don't know. He came hobbling in after his goose-chase to London on your account, losing a couple of days' work; and I warrant he will have to be shaken before he gets about his business."

"I can get downstairs," Mary said, "if Ned will help to carry me. I fear I cannot put my leg to the ground yet."

"No; and you may give up the notion. If you come down, you may as lief do without a nurse, and take to your lawful business. It is a pretty thing!—one of you gadding off to town and thinking herself a fine lady, and t'other laming herself and wanting to be tended by a paid woman."

At this juncture Goody Pearse awoke, bewildered and much alarmed by the presence of Mistress Forrester. She expected a sharp reprimand, but Mistress

Forrester left the room without another word either to nurse or patient.

"Dear heart! what made you get up afore I was ready? You'll have raging pain in your foot again, sure as fate."

"I must get downstairs to-day to see Master Humphrey Ratcliffe. Ned will help me."

Mary's resolution did not falter. Her humble and faithful admirer, Ned, appeared at the attic door, when summoned by Goody Pearse, to help her downstairs. Ned made short work of it; he lifted Mary in his arms, and trudged down the creaking steps with her without a single halt, and placed her by her desire on the settle, where her leg could rest. Mary's smile was a sufficient reward for Ned. But when Mary held out her hand, and said she owed him more than tongue could tell for going to London, Ned was speechless with emotion. At last he blurted out,—

"I'd walk a hundred miles to serve you, Mistress; I'd even ride 'em for your sake. But, oh, Lord! I am sore to-day with the cramp I got a-horseback. Here is a letter from Master Ratcliffe; he bid me put into your hands and into none other, and I have kept to the order. Take it, Mistress."

Mary held out her hand, and took the much crumpled and soiled letter from Ned's large, brown fingers. But she had not opened it when Humphrey Ratcliffe himself came up to the porch, and stopped short on the threshold as if struck by some sudden blow.

He was not prepared to see so great a change in Mary in so short a time. Pain of body, however severe, nor the deep cut in her forehead, could hardly have

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left such traces of suffering on her face—still, in Humphrey's eyes, beautiful, though with lines of sorrow round her mouth and eyes.

"Enter, my kind friend," Mary said, in a low, sweet voice, holding out her hand to him. "This good Ned," she said, "has faithfully performed his errand, and deserves our thanks." Ned, bashful and awkward made for the door and disappeared. "But what news? Is there aught to tell me of my child?"

Humphrey had by this time advanced to the settle, and, kneeling by it, he took Mary's hand in his, and kissed it gently and reverently.

"I could find no trace of the boy in Tunbridge. The whole colony of Papists has broken up and fled. Some of their number have been thrown into prison, awaiting judgment of conspiracy. I did not tarry, therefore, at Tunbridge, but rode on here last night."

"Yes," Mary said. "I heard your voice; and now—now what next?"

"It is my purpose to follow that villain who kidnapped the boy, and regain possession of him. It is a puzzle to me to understand why he should steal him."

"He is so handsome, so clever," his mother said. "Humphrey, I cannot, I cannot lose him. I must find him; and he will break his heart for his mother," she said passionately. "His mother! bereft and desolate without him."

"We will find him," Humphrey said, "never fear. My noble master has given me leave to go on the quest to France, or, it may be, the Low Countries, for the Papists have schools and centres of worship in all the Protestant towns."

"The Low Countries," Mary said, "I have a friend there, at Arnhem, one George Gifford; he is an honest and godly minister. In my first grief and despair years ago, I sent a letter to him for counsel. He was then in England, and acted a father's part by me, though only my husband's uncle. Yes, I will go to him as soon as I can put my foot on the ground. I will leave all things, and go on the quest myself—alone."

"Not alone!" Humphrey said, "not alone, but with me. Oh, Mary! I will tend you and care for you, and we will seek together for *our* boy—mine as yours, yours as mine. We will go to this good man of whom you speak, and all will be well. God will speed us."

"Nay, dear friend," Mary said. "Nay, it cannot be. I can never be your wife."

"And, by Heaven, why not? What hinders? Something tells me, presumptuous though it may be, that you might give me a little—a little love, in return for mine. Why is it beyond hope?"

"Hush!" Mary said, "you do not know why it is beyond hope."

Humphrey's brow darkened, and he bit his under lip to restrain his irritation.

Presently Mary laid her hand on his shoulder as he knelt by her.

"It is beyond hope," she said, "because the man who stole my child from me is my husband."

Humphrey started to his feet, and said in a voice of mingled rage and despair,—

"The villain! the despicable villain! I will run him through the body an I get the chance."

“Nay, Humphrey,” Mary said in pleading tones, “do not make my burden heavier by these wild words. Rumours had reached me in the winter of last year, when the Earl of Leicester with his large following were at Penshurst, that my husband was alive. Since then I have never felt secure; yet I did not dare to doff my widow’s garments, fearing—hoping the report was false. As soon as I heard of this man lurking about the countryside, a horrible dread possessed me. He asked Lucy to bring Ambrose to meet him—this strengthened my fears. From that moment I never let the boy out of my sight. Thus, on that morning of doom, I took him with me to look for the shepherd and the lost lamb. Ah! woe is me! He was lying in wait. He had told me, when as I sat late in the porch one evening, that he would have my boy, and I knew he would wreak his vengeance on me by this cruel deed. I seized Ambrose by the hand and ran—you know the rest—I fell unconscious; and when I awoke from my stupor, the light of my eyes was gone from me.

“Ah! if God had taken my boy by death; if I had seen him laid in the cold grave, at least I could have wept, and committed him to safe keeping in the hands of his Heavenly Father—safe in Paradise from all sin. But now—now he will be taught to lie; and to hate what is good; and be brought up a Papist; and bidden to forget his mother—his *mother!*”

Humphrey Ratcliffe listened, as Mary spoke, like one in a dream.

He must be forgiven if, for the moment, the mother’s grief for the loss of her boy seemed a small

matter, when compared with his despair that he had lost her.

For a few moments neither spoke, and then with a great rush of passionate emotion, Humphrey flung himself on his knees by Mary's side, crying out,—

“Mary! Mary! say one word to comfort me. Say, at least, if it were possible, you could love me. Why should you be loyal to that faithless villain? Come to me, Mary.”

The poor, desolate heart, that was pierced with so many wounds, craved, hungered for the love offered her. How gladly would she have gone to Humphrey, how thankfully felt the support of his honest and steadfast love. But Mary Gifford was not a weak woman—swayed hither and thither by the passing emotion of the moment. Clear before her, even in her sorrow, was the line of duty. The sacred crown of motherhood was on her brow, and should she dare to dim its brightness by yielding to the temptation which, it is not too much to say, Humphrey's words put before her.

She gathered all her strength, and said in a calm voice,—

“You must never speak thus to me again, Humphrey Ratcliffe. I am—God help me—the wife of Ambrose Gifford, and,” she paused, and then with pathetic earnestness, “*I am the mother of his son.* Let that suffice.”

Again there was a long silence. From without came the monotonous cawing of the rooks in the elm trees, the occasional bleating of the lambs in the pastures seeking their mother's side, and the voices of the

shepherd's children, who had come down to fetch the thin butter-milk which Mistress Forrester measured out to the precise value of the small coin the shepherd's wife sent in exchange.

It was a sore struggle, but it was over at last.

When Humphrey Ratcliffe rose from his knees, Mary had the reward which a good and true woman may ever expect sooner or later to receive from a noble-hearted man, in a like case.

"You are right, Mary," he said, "as you ever are. Forgive me, and in token thereof let us now proceed to discuss the plans for the rescue of your boy."

This was now done with surprising calmness on both sides.

Humphrey decided to start first for Douay, and then, failing to trace any tidings of the boy, he would proceed to Arnhem, and enlist the sympathies and help of the good man, George Gifford, to get upon the right track for the recovery of his nephew's child.

"He is a just man, and will tender the best advice," Mary said. "It is true that a father has a right to his own son, but sure I have a right, and a right to save him from the hands of Papists. But I have little hope—it is dead within me—quite dead. My last hope for this world died when I lost my boy."

"God grant I may kindle that hope into life once more," Humphrey said, in a voice of restrained emotion, and not daring to trust himself to say another word, he bent his knee again before Mary, took the long, slender hands which hung listlessly at her side, and bowing his head for a moment over them, Humphrey Ratcliffe was gone!

Mary neither spoke nor moved, and when Goody Pearse came with a bowl of milk and bread she found her in a deadly swoon, from which it was hard to recall her. Mistress Forrester came at the old woman's call, and burnt feathers under Mary's nose, and, with a somewhat ruthless hand, dashed cold water over her pale, wan face, calling her loudly by name; and, when at last she recovered, she scolded her for attempting to come downstairs, and said she had no patience with sick folk giving double trouble by wilful ways. Better things were expected of grown women than to behave like children, with a great deal more to the same purpose, which seemed to have no effect on Mary, who lay with large wistful eyes gazing out at the open door through which Humphrey had passed—large tearless eyes looking in vain for her boy, who would never gladden them again!

"The light of mine eyes!" she whispered; "the light of mine eyes!"

"Shut the door," Mistress Forrester said to her serving-maid, Avice, who stood with her large, red arms folded, looking with awe at the pallid face before her. "She calls out that the light dazes her; methinks she must be got back to bed, and kept there."

The heavy wooden door was closed, and but a subdued light came in through the small diamond panes of thick, greenish glass which filled the lattice. Presently the large weary eyes closed, and with a gentle sigh, she said,—

"I am tired; let me sleep, if sleep will come."

The business of the poultry-yard and dairy were far too important to be further neglected, and Mistress

Forrester, sharply calling Avice to mind her work, nor stand gaping there like a gander on a common, left Goody Pearse with her patient.

The old crone did her best, though that best was poor.

Nursing in the days of Queen Elizabeth was of a very rough and ready character, and even in high circles, there was often gross ignorance displayed in the treatment of the sick.

The village nurse had her own nostrums and lotions, and the country apothecary, or leech as he was called, who led very often a nomadic life, taking rounds in certain districts, and visiting at intervals lonely homesteads and hamlets, was obliged, and perhaps content, to leave his patient to her care, and very often her treatment was as likely to be beneficial as his own.

Goody Pearse, to do her justice, had that great requisite for a nurse, in every age and time—a kind heart.

She felt very sorry for Mary, and, when Mistress Forrester was gone, she crooned over her, and smoothed the pillow at her head, and then proceeded to examine her foot, and bind it up afresh in rags steeped in one of her own lotions.

The doctor had ordered potations of wine for Mary, and Mistress Forrester had produced a bottle of sack from her stores, a mugful of which Goody Pearse now held to Mary's pale lips.

"I only want quiet," she said, in a low, pathetic voice; "quiet, and, if God please, sleep."

"And this will help it, dear heart," the old woman said. "Sup it up, like a good child, for, Heaven help you, you are young enow."

Mary smiled faintly.

"Young! nay; was I ever young and glad?"

"Yes, my dearie, and you'll be young and glad again afore long. There! you are better already, and Ned shall carry you up again when there's peace and quiet."

It was evening, and Mary Gifford had been laid again on her own bed, when quick footsteps were heard before the house, and Lucy's voice,—

"How fares it with Mary?"

Goody Pearse was on the watch at the casement above and called out,—

"Come up and see for yourself, Lucy Forrester."

Lucy was up the crooked, uneven stairs in a moment, and Mary, stretching out her arms, said,—

"Oh! Lucy, Lucy."

The two sisters were locked in a long embrace.

"I am sorry you are fetched back from all your pleasures, little sister," Mary said at last

"Nay, I am glad to come. I have had a taste of happiness, and it will last till you are well, and we both go away from here, and the boy is found—for he will be found—Humphrey Ratcliffe will scour the world ere he gives up finding him, and Mr. Sidney has granted him leave to go whither he lists, to get hold of that wicked man with his horrible, cruel, black eyes. How I hate him!"

"Do not speak of him," Mary said, shuddering: "do not speak of him," and she put her hand to her side, as if the very mention of him sent a pang through her heart. "Let me look at you, Lucy," she said presently. "Turn your face to the light that I may scan it, Ah!"

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she said, "still my little, innocent sister, and with a happy light in her eyes."

Lucy's face grew crimson.

"Yes," she said. "I have been happy, though there have been some crooks and quips to bear from old Mother Crawley. Yet, oh, Mary! when there is one big heart-joy, everything else seems so small, and poor, and mean."

"Have you made George Ratcliffe happy, then, with a promise to requite his love?"

"George Ratcliffe!" Lucy exclaimed. "Nay, Mary—not for a lap full of gold."

"Who, then, is it? for there is someone? Who is it, Lucy? I pray God he is a noble Christian gentleman."

"He is the noblest, and best, and highest that ever lived. Harken, Mary! and do not scoff at me—nor scorn me. No, you can never do that, I know. My knight is far above me—so far, it may be that he will never stoop so low as to give me more than passing signs of his good-will. But I *have had* these. He has shone on me with his smile, he has thought of my comfort, he did not deem the country maiden of no account, when grand ladies were ogling him, and trying to win his favour, he did not think me beneath notice when he lifted me on the saddle this very morning, and covered me with a warm cloth, and bade me 'God speed.' If nought else comes—well, I will live on what I have had from him. The crumbs of bread from him are sweeter and richer than a feast from another. As I have jogged hither to-day, there has been the thought of him to make me willing to give up

everything to gain his approval—his meed of praise. He bid me come to you, and I came. Nay, it was my Lady Pembroke who *bid* me come—it was Humphrey Ratcliffe who said I *must* e'en come—but it was my knight who told me I *did well* to come. And at these words a new feeling quickened in me about it.

“You do not understand, Mary, I see you do not understand. You think me silly, and vain, and selfish—and you are right. I am all three. I have been all three, and hot-tempered, and saucy, and oh! a hundred other things, but now I have an aim to be good and act in all things as my knight would have me. Oh, Mary, could you have seen him as he rode into the tilt-yard on Whit-Monday, in his blue and gold armour, sitting on his fine horse, so stately and grand—could you have seen him break lance after lance, his face shining like the sun, you would know what it is for me to feel such an one can give a thought to me—even a passing thought.

“Mary! Mary! I cannot help it. I love him—I worship him—and there is an end of the whole matter. It will make no odds whether what looks impossible becomes possible—he is to me what no one beside can ever be. There, it is out now, and I pray you do not despise me. I will be ever so patient now. I will do all I am bidden, and one day, Mary, we will leave this place—it is no home now, and I will return to my Lady Pembroke, and Humphrey Ratcliffe will find Ambrose, and you will be his wife, and—”

“Hush, Lucy; not a word more. I will keep sacred and secret in my heart what you have told me, dear child. I will not judge you hardly. You are young—

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so young—as young as I was when I went forth to sorrow and misery. For you, even though I think your dream baseless, and that you are feeding hope on what may turn out to be the ashes of disappointment, I will not despair. I know your idol is worthy, and love for one who is pure and noble cannot work ill in the end. I will keep your secret; now, Lucy, little sister—keep mine. I can never wed with another man, for my husband lives—and has stolen from me my boy.”

“Mary, Mary!” Lucy exclaimed, as she hid her face, weeping, on her sister’s pillow. “Oh, Mary! I will try to comfort you. I will not think only of myself—I will think of you and all you suffer. Mary, I am not really so heartless and vain, I will be good and comfort you, Mary.”

Mary Gifford stroked Lucy’s brown head, and murmured,—

“Dear child! dear child! we will help each other now as we have never done before.”

From that moment, from that day of her return to Ford Manor, Lucy Forrester seemed to have left her careless, pleasure-loving, pleasure-seeking girlhood behind. She had crossed the meeting place of the brook and river of womanhood and childhood. Some cross it all unawares—others with reluctant, lingering feet; some, like Lucy Forrester, brought face to face with the great realities of life and of suffering love, suddenly find themselves on the other side to return no more.

BOOK II.

Since nature's works be good, and death doth serve
As nature's work, why should we fear to die?
Since fear is vain but when it may preserve,
Why should we fear that which we cannot fly?
Fear is more pain than is the pain it fears,
Disarming human minds of native might;
While each conceit an ugly figure bears
Which were we ill, well viewed in reason's light.
Our owly eyes, which dimmed with passions be,
And scarce discern the day of coming day,
Let them be cleared, and now begin to see
Our life is but a step in dusty way,
Then let us hold the bliss of peaceful mind:
Since, feeling this, great loss we cannot find.

Arcadia, p. 457.

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

BOOK 15

There is a great deal of
work to be done in the
field of the study of the
history of the world. It is
not only a matter of
collecting facts, but of
interpreting them. The
historian must be able to
see the connection between
the events of the past and
the present. He must be
able to see the cause and
effect of the various
events. He must be able to
see the influence of the
past on the present. He
must be able to see the
influence of the present on
the future. He must be
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able to see the influence of
the future on the present.

THE HISTORY OF THE
WORLD

CHAPTER X.

AT WILTON.

“The silk well could they twist and twine,
And make the fair march pine,
And with the needle work;
And they could help the priest to say
His matins on a holy day,
And sing a psalm at kirk.”

November 1585.

Old Rhyme.

THE chastened sunshine of an All Saints' summer was lying upon the fair lawns and terrace walks of Wilton House, near Salisbury, in the year 1585. It was November, but so soft and balmy was the air that even the birds were apparently ready to believe that winter was passed over and spring had come.

The thrushes and blackbirds were answering each other from the trees, and the air was filled with their melody and with the scent of the late flowers in the pleasance, lying close under the cloisters, facing the beautiful undulating grounds of Lord Pembroke's mansion near Salisbury.

The graceful figure of a lady was coming down the grassy slope towards the house; a boy of five or six years old, with a miniature bow and arrow in his hand, at her side.

“I would like another shot at this old beech tree,

mother," the child said. "I do not care to come in to my tasks yet."

"Will must be an obedient boy, or what will Uncle Philip say, if he comes to-day and finds him in disgrace with his tutor?"

"Uncle Philip isn't here," the child said.

"But he will be ere noon. I have had a despatch from him; he is already at Salisbury, and may be here at any hour."

At this moment Lady Pembroke saw one of her ladies hastening towards her, and exclaimed,—

"Ah, Lucy! have you come to capture the truant?"

"Yes, Madam, and to tell you that Sir Philip Sidney's courier has ridden into the courtyard to announce his Master's speedy arrival."

"Then I will not go till I have seen Uncle Philip!" and Will dragged at Lucy's hand as she attempted to lead him towards the house.

"Nay, Will," his mother said, "you must do as you are bid." And forthwith the boy pouted; yet he knew to resist his mother's will was useless. But presently there was a shout, as he broke away from Lucy Forrester's hand, with the cry,—

"Uncle Philip!" and in another moment Sir Philip had taken his little nephew in his arms, and, saluting him, set him on his feet again. Then, with a bow and smile to Lucy, he bent his knee with his accustomed grace before his sister, who stooped down and kissed him lovingly, with the words,—

"Welcome! welcome! dear Philip. Thrice welcome, to confirm the good news of which my lord had notice yester even."

"Yes; I have come to say much, and to discuss many schemes with you. I stay but till the morrow, when I would fain you got ready to see me later at Penshurst."

"At Penshurst!"

"Yes. I have set my heart on meeting all my kindred—more especially our father and mother—there ere I depart. Now, now, Will! wherefore all this struggling to resist Mistress Forrester? Fie, fie! for shame!"

"It is the attraction of your presence, Philip, which is too much for Will," Lady Pembroke said.

"Then, if I am the culprit, I will do penance, and take the boy in hand myself. See, Will, you are to come with me to your tasks, nor give Mistress Forrester so much trouble." And Lucy found herself free from the child's detaining hand, as Sir Philip went, with swift steps, towards the house—his little nephew running fast to keep up with him.

Lucy followed, and met Sir Philip in the hall where the tutor had captured the truant.

"Any news from Arnhem, Mistress Forrester?" Sir Philip asked. "Any good news from Mistress Gifford?"

"Nay, sir, no news of the boy; and even our good friend Master Humphrey Ratcliffe is ready to give up the quest."

"Nay, it shall not be given up. I am starting in a few days to the Low Countries, as Governor of Flushing."

"So my lady told me, sir, this morning," Lucy said demurely.

"Yes, and I shall be on the alert; depend on it, if

the boy is alive, he shall be found. But I begin to fear that he is dead. Why should I say fear, forsooth? Death would be better than his training by Jesuits, and so leagued with Spain and all her evil machinations."

Lucy curtseyed, and, with a gentle "Good-morning to you, sir," she went to her duties under Mistress Crawley.

Lucy had changed from the impetuous child in the first flush of her youth and consciousness of beauty, into a woman almost graver than her years, and so little disposed to accept any overtures of marriage, that the ladies of the Countess of Pembroke's household called her the little nun.

One after another they drifted off as the wives of the gentlemen and esquires, who were retainers of the Earl; but Lucy Forrester remained, high in favour with her lady, and even spoken of by Mistress Crawley as "clever enough, and civil spoken," the real truth being that she had become indispensable to Mistress Crawley, and was trusted by her to take in hand the instruction of the young maidens who came from the homes of the gentry and nobility, in a long succession, to enter the household of Lady Pembroke, which was an honour greatly coveted by many.

Soon after Mary Gifford's great sorrow in the loss of her child, Mistress Forrester astonished her step-daughter by announcing her marriage to one of her Puritan neighbours, who was, in truth, but a herdsman on one of the farms, but who had acquired a notoriety by a certain rough eloquence in preaching and praying at the secret meetings held in Mistress Forrester's barn.

He was well pleased to give up his earthly calling at Mistress Forrester's bidding, for he would scarcely have presumed to address her as a suitor without very marked encouragement. He fell into very comfortable quarters, and, if he was henpecked, he took it as a part of his discipline, and found good food and good lodging a full compensation.

Then Mary Gifford and her sister were offered a small sum of money to represent their right in their father's house, and left it with very little regret on their side, and supreme satisfaction on their stepmother's. Lucy returned to Lady Pembroke's household, and Mary Gifford, through the ever-ready help of Humphrey Ratcliffe, broken down as she was prematurely in mind and body, found an asylum in the home of her husband's uncle, Master George Gifford, at Arnhem, from which place she made many vain inquiries to lead to the discovery of her boy, which hitherto had proved fruitless.

True and loyal to her interests, Humphrey Ratcliffe never again approached her with passionate declarations of love. He was one of those men who can be faithful unto death, and give unfaltering allegiance to the woman they feel it is hopeless to win. Loving her well, but loving honour, hers and his own, more, Humphrey went bravely on the straight road of duty, with no regretful, backward glances, no murmurs at the roughness of the way, taking each step as it came with unfaltering resolutions, with a heavy heart at times; but what did that matter? And in all this determination to act as a brave, true man should act, Humphrey Ratcliffe had ever before him the example of his

master, Sir Philip Sidney. Second only to his love for Mary Gifford was his devotion to him. It is said that scarcely an instance is recorded of any of those who were closely associated with Sir Philip Sidney who did not, in those last years of his short life, feel ennobled by his influence. And Humphrey Ratcliffe was no exception to this all but universal law.

Mean men, with base, low aims and motives, shunned the society of this noble Christian gentleman. His clever and accomplished uncle, the brilliant and unscrupulous Earl of Leicester, must often have been constrained to feel, and perhaps acknowledge, that there was something in his nephew which raised him to a height he had never attained—with all his success at Court, his Queen's devotion, and the fame which ranked him in foreign countries as the most successful of all Elizabeth's favourites.

Lady Pembroke awaited her brother's return from the house. Going towards it to meet him, she put her hand in his arm and said,—

"Let us have our talk in the familiar place where we have wandered together so often, Philip."

"Yes," he said, "all these fair slopes and pleasant prospects bring back to me, Mary, the days, the many days, when I found my best comforter in you. How fares it with the *Arcadia*?"

"It is winding out its long story," Lady Pembroke said, laughing. "Too long, methinks, for there is much that I would blot out if I dare essay to do so. But tell me, Philip, of this great appointment. Are you not glad now that the design respecting Sir Francis Drake's expedition fell to nought. I ever thought that

expedition, at the best, one of uncertain issue and great risk. Sure, Philip, you are of my mind now."

"Nay, Mary, not altogether. I hailed the chance of getting free from idleness and the shackles of the Court. And moreover," he said, "it is a splendid venture, and my heart swelled with triumph as I saw that grand armament ready to sail from Plymouth. Methinks, even now, I feel a burning desire to be one of those brave men who are crossing the seas with Drake to those far-off islands and territories, with all their wondrous treasures, of which such stories are told."

As Philip spoke, his sister saw his face kindling with an almost boyish enthusiasm, and the ardent young soldier, eager, and almost wild, to set sail across the great dividing sea, seemed to replace for the moment the more dignified man of matured powers, who was now Governor of Flushing.

"It is all past," he said, "and I will do my utmost to forget my disappointment. It is somewhat hard to forgive Drake for what I must think false dealing with me, for I know well by whose means those mandates came to Plymouth from the Queen. There was nought left for me but to obey, for disobedience would have kept back the whole fleet; but the whole transaction has left a sore—"

"Which will rapidly heal, Philip, in this new, and to my mind at least, far grander appointment. Sure, to be Governor of Flushing means a high place, and a field for showing all you are as a statesman and soldier. I am proud and pleased; more proud of you than ever before, were that possible."

They had reached a favourite spot now, where,

from a slightly rising ground, there was and is a beautiful view of Salisbury Cathedral.

"See yonder spire pointing skyward, Mary, how it seems to cleave the sky, this November sky, which is like that of June? The spire, methinks, reads me a lesson at this time. It saith to me, 'Sursum corda.'"

Lady Pembroke pressed her brother's arm with answering sympathy, and, looking up into his face, she saw there the shining of a great hope and the upward glance of a steadfast faith.

"Yes," Sir Philip said, "I am happy in this lot which has fallen to me, and I pray God I may avenge the cause of those who are trodden down by the tyranny of Spain. The Queen's noble words inspired me with great confidence in the righteousness of the cause for which I am to fight. Her Grace said her object was a holy one—even to procure peace to the holders of the Reformed Faith, restoration of their time-honoured rights in the Netherlands, and above all, the safety of England. It is a great work, Mary; wish me God speed."

"I do, I do; and now tell me about Frances and the babe. When is her christening to be performed?"

"In four days. The Queen is so gracious as to ride from Richmond to London to name our babe herself, and will dispense gifts in honour thereof. My sweet Frances, the child's mother, is not as hearty as I would fain see her, so she consents to delay her coming to Flushing till I can assure myself that all is well prepared for her. I ride to London on the morrow. The babe will be christened there. Two days later I purpose to convey mother and child to Penshurst,

where all who wish to bid me farewell will gather. Our good father and mother, who do not feel strength enough for the festivity of the Court, even to be present at the babe's christening, proceed thither to-morrow from Ludlow. Will you join them there, or accompany me to London?"

"I will await your coming at Penshurst, Philip. I am somewhat disturbed at the last letters from our dear father. He speaks of being broken down in body and dejected in spirit. Verily, I can scarce forgive the mistress he has served so well for her treatment of him. God grant you get a better guerdon for faithful service than our father and mother won."

"It is true, too true," Sir Philip said, "that they were ill-requited, but has anyone ever fared better who has striven to do duty in that unhappy country of Ireland? It needs a Hercules of strength and a Solon of wisdom, ay, and a Cræsus of wealth to deal with it. In the future generations such a man may be found, but not in this."

"Will you take the two boys with you, Robert and Thomas?"

"I shall take Robert and put him in a post of command. Thomas is all agog to come also, but he is too young and weakly, though he would rave if he heard me call him so. He shall follow in good time. There is a brave spirit in Thomas which is almost too great for his body, and he is not prone to be so lavish as Robert, who has the trick of getting into debt, out of which I have again and again helped to free him. In my youth I too had not learned to suit my wants to my means, but the lesson is now, I pray, got by heart.

A husband and father must needs look well to the money which is to provide all things for these weak and defenceless ones who lean on him."

"You speak of your youth as past, Philip," Mary said. "It makes me laugh. You look, yes, far younger than some five or six years ago."

"Happiness has a power to smoothe out wrinkles, I know, sweet sister. Witness your face, on which time refuses to leave a trace, and," he added earnestly, "happiness—rather a peaceful and contented mind—has come to me at last. When my tender wife, loyal and true, looks up at me with her guileless eyes, full of love and trust, I feel I am thrice blest in possessing her. And, Mary, the sight of our babe thrilled me strangely. The little crumpled bit of humanity, thrusting out her tiny hands, as if to find out where she was. That quaint smile, which Frances says, is meant for her; that feeble little bleating cry—all seemed like messages to me to quit myself as a man should, and, protecting my child in her infancy, leave to her and her mother a name which will make them proud to have been my wife and my daughter."

"And that name you will surely leave, Philip."

"Be it sooner or later, God grant it," was the fervent reply.

The Countess soon after went into the house to make some arrangements for departure, and to write a letter to her sister-in-law, with a beautiful christening present, which she was to send by her brother's hand.

Sir Philip lingered still in the familiar grounds of Wilton, which were dear to him from many associations. The whole place was familiar to him, and with a strange

presage of farewell, a last farewell, he trod all the old paths between the closely-clipped yew hedges, and scarcely left a nook or corner unvisited.

The country lying round Wilton was also familiar to him. Many a time he had ridden to Old Sarum, and, giving his horse to his groom, had wandered about in that city of the dead past, which with his keen poetical imagination he peopled with those who had once lived within its walls, of which but a few crumbling stones, turf-covered, remain. A stately church once stood there; voices of prayer and praise rose to God, hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, gay young life, and sorrowful old age, had in times long since past been "told as a tale" in the city on the hill, as now in the city in the valley, where the spire of the new Cathedral rises skyward.

New! Only by comparison, for old and new are but relative terms after all, and it is hard, as we stand under the vaulted roof of Salisbury Cathedral, to let our thoughts reach back to the far-off time when the stately church stood out as a new possession to take the place of the ruined temple, which had once lifted its head as the centre of Old Sarum.

Sir Philip Sidney had left several of his servants at Salisbury, and, when he had bidden the Countess good-bye, till they met again in a few days at Penshurst, he rode back to the city, and, leaving his horse at the White Hart, he passed under St. Anne's Gateway, and crossed the close to the south door of the Cathedral.

The bell was chiming for the even-song, and Sir Philip passed in. He was recognised by an old verger, who, with a low bow, preceded him to the choir,

Lady Pembroke was right when she said that her brother looked younger than he had looked some years before.

There never was a time, perhaps, in his life, when his face had been more attractive and his bearing more distinguished than now.

The eyes of the somewhat scanty congregation were directed to him as he stood chanting in his clear, sweet musical voice the Psalms for the second evening of the month.

The sun, entering at the west door, caught his "amber locks" and made them glow like an aureole round his head, as he lifted it with glad assurance when the words left his lips.

"But my trust is in Thy mercy, and my heart is joyful in Thy salvation. I will sing of the Lord because He hath dealt so lovingly with me; yea, I will praise the name of the Lord Most Highest."

Those who saw Sir Philip Sidney that day, recalled him as he stood in the old oaken stall, only one short year later, when, with bowed head and sad hearts, they could but pray in the words of the Collect for the week, "that they might follow the blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living, that they might come to those unspeakable joys which are prepared for them that love God."

Sir Philip had not time to delay, though the Dean hurried after the service to greet him and to offer hospitality.

"I must be on my road to London," he said, "for a great event awaits me there, Mr. Dean—the baptism

of my little daughter, to whom the Queen is graciously pleased to stand godmother."

"And God give you a safe journey, Sir Philip, and bless the child," the kindly Dean said. "How fares it with the daughter of my good friend Sir Francis Walsingham? I trust she is well recovered."

"Fairly well," Sir Philip replied. "She is young and somewhat fragile, but I trust will soon be able to join me at Flushing."

After the exchange of a few more kindly words and congratulations, Sir Philip Sidney was leaving the Cathedral, when a figure, still kneeling in the nave, arrested his attention, and as his footsteps drew near, the bowed head was raised, and Sir Philip saw it was Lucy Forrester.

He passed on, but lingered outside for a few moments, till, as he expected, Lucy came out.

"I am glad to see you once more," Sir Philip said; "if only to bid you farewell, and to assure you I will not fail to track out the villain, who may, at least, give me tidings of Mistress Gifford's boy. I will see her also, if possible."

"You are very good, sir," Lucy said.

But she moved on with quick steps towards St. Anne's Gateway.

"Have you aught that I can convey to Mistress Gifford? If so, commit it to my care at Penshurst, whither, I suppose, you go with the Countess on the morrow or next day. Then we shall meet again—so now, farewell."

Years had passed since Lucy had subdued the tumultuous throb at her heart when in Sir Philip's

presence. He was still her ideal of all that was noble and pure and courteous; her true knight, who, having filled her childish and girlish dreams, still reigned supreme.

There are mysteries in the human heart that must ever remain unfathomable, and it is not for us to judge one another when we are confronted by them, and can find no clue to solve them.

Lucy Forrester's romantic love for Sir Philip Sidney had worked her no ill; rather, it had strengthened her on the way; and from that night when she and Mary Gifford had exchanged their secrets she had striven to keep her promise, and to be, as she had said she wished to be, really good.

The atmosphere of Lady Pembroke's house had helped her, and had been an education to her in the best sense of the word.

"Fare you well, sir," she said. "I must hasten to find Mistress Crawley. We came hither to the city for something wanted from a shop ere we start on our journey; but I craved leave to go to the Cathedral for a few minutes. This is how you found me, sir, there."

There was something in Lucy's voice which seemed to betray anxiety as to whether Sir Philip might think she was alone in Salisbury; and something of relief when she exclaimed,—

"Ah, there is Mistress Crawley!" as she tripped away to meet her, Sir Philip repeating as she left him, —"Fare you well, Mistress Lucy. *Au revoir.*"

CHAPTER XI.

LUMEN FAMILIÆ SUÆ.

“Was ever eye did see such face?
Was never ear did hear that tongue?
Was never mind did mind his grace,
That ever thought the travail long?
But eyes, and ears, and every thought,
Were with his sweet perfections caught.”

SPENSER.

PENSHURST CASTLE never, perhaps, wore a more festive air than when in the November days of lengthening twilight and falling leaves, Sir Philip Sidney's friends and relatives gathered under the hospitable roof to congratulate him on his appointment to the Governorship of Flushing and Rammekins, the patent having been granted at Westminster on the seventh day of the month.

Sir Philip had taken leave of the Queen after she had honoured him by standing as godmother to his little daughter. He had now brought her and her mother to Penshurst to leave them there in safety, till he had arranged for their reception at Flushing, and found proper accomodation for them.

It was a goodly company that assembled in the grand old hall on the day before Sir Philip's departure. There were, we may be sure, many present whose names live on the pages of the history of the time.

The courtly Earl of Leicester was there, who, with whatever outward show of satisfaction at his nephew's promotion, was never free from a latent jealousy which he was careful to hide.

Sir Francis Walsingham was there, the proud grandfather of the tiny babe which Lady Mary Sidney held so tenderly in her arms, scanning her features to discover in them a likeness to her father. Sir Henry Sidney was with her, prematurely old and feeble, trying to shake off the melancholy which possessed him, and striving to forget his own troubled and ill-requited service to the Queen, in his pride that his son was placed in a position where his splendid gifts might have full play.

"The light of his family," he always fondly called Philip, and he would not grudge that this light should shed its radiance far beyond his own home and country.

Was it a strange prescience of coming sorrow that made Sir Henry for the most part silent, and sigh when the Earl of Leicester tried to rally him, saying that it was a time of rejoicing, and why should any face wear a look of sadness.

"We part from our son, good uncle," Lady Mary said, "on the morrow, and partings in old age have a greater significance than in youth. We please ourselves with future meetings when we are young; when we are old, we know full well that there is but a short span of life left us, for re-union with those who are dear to us."

As the short day closed in, the huge logs in the centre of the hall sent forth a ruddy glow. The torches set in the iron staples on the walls were lighted, and

flickered on the plentifully-spread board and on the faces of those gathered there. As the company at the upper end, on the raised dais, rose to retire to the private apartments of the house, the minstrels in the gallery struck up a joyful strain, and at the foot of the stairs Sir Philip paused.

He looked down on the faces of many friends and retainers, faithful in their allegiance, with a proud, glad smile. Many of them were to follow him to his new post as Governor. All were ready to do so, and die in the cause he held sacred, if so it must be.

It was not without intention that Sir Philip waited till the company had passed him, detaining his young wife by drawing her hand through his arm, and saying to the nurse who held his little daughter,—

“Tarry for one moment, Mistress Joan.”

“My friends,” he said, “you who follow me to Flushing, I pray I may live to reward you for the faithful service you will render me. God grant you may return in health and peace to your wives and children. If it please God, I shall myself return in due season; but there are many chances in war, and a soldier’s future must ever be doubtful. So, should I fall in the fight against the tyranny of Spain and the machinations of Rome, I say to you, show to this fair lady, my sweet wife, all reverent care and honour, for, forsooth, she will merit it; and as for this little lady Elizabeth, the godchild of our gracious Sovereign,” he continued, smiling as he took the child from the nurse’s arms, “I commend her to you also. You see but little of her, she is so swathed in folds of lace and what not, and, in good sooth, there is but little to see; but she

gives promise of being a dainty little maiden, not unworthy to be the Queen's name-child, and the daughter of the gentle Dame Frances Sidney."

"Nor unworthy to be the child of Sir Philip Sidney, a greater honour than all the rest, methinks."

These words were spoken in a deep, manly voice by Sir Francis Walsingham, who had stopped on the stairs when he saw his son-in-law pause with his wife and child.

The remark was received with a prolonged "Ay," and a murmur of many voices wishing Sir Philip all success and good fortune.

There was dancing in the spacious ballroom, which was lighted for the occasion by the three cut-glass chandeliers, surmounted by the royal crown, which were, it is said, the first made in England, and presented to Sir Henry Sidney by Queen Elizabeth. Here the younger portion of the guests enjoyed the dance then so popular, and which was known by the appropriate name of "The Brawl."

The elders had followed Lady Mary Sidney to the room known as Queen Elizabeth's, where the chairs, draped in yellow satin, and the card-table covered by the fine silk embroidery worked by the Queen's clever fingers, were all in their first freshness. On the walls were panels of worked silk, which the ladies of the family had their share in producing, and between them hung the portraits of Sir Philip and his brother Robert in childhood in their stiff and ungainly Court dress, and one of Lady Mary when she came as a bride to Penshurst—in the pride of her youth and beauty, before the smallpox had robbed her face of its fair com-

plexion, and before sorrow and disappointment had left their trace upon it.

The Countess of Pembroke was always her mother's chief sympathiser in joy and sorrow. She retired with her behind the glass screen where the Queen, in her visits to Penshurst, always chose to summon her host, or any of her ministers for a private conversation or flirtation, as the case might be. By the opening of a panel of white Venetian glass, those who were seated behind the screen could watch unseen what was passing in the room beyond.

"You look weary, dear mother," Lady Pembroke said—"weary and sad. Methinks pride in our Philip should overrule grief at his loss. He has been well versed in the manners and customs of foreign courts. He is a great favourite, and I hope to see him return with fresh laurels at no distant date."

"Ah, Mary! you have, as I said to my brother but an hour ago, you have a future; for me there is only a short span left. Yet I can rejoice in the present bliss of seeing Philip a proud husband and father. There was a time when I feared he would never turn his thoughts towards another woman."

"And I, sweet mother, always felt sure he would be the victor he has proved. Look at him now!" As she spoke Sir Philip was seen coming down the room with Lady Frances on his arm, Sir Fulke Greville on the other side, evidently some jest passing between them, for Sir Philip's face was sparkling with smiles, and his silvery laugh reached the ears of those behind the screen as he passed.

"Yes, he has the air of a man who is happy, doubt-

less," his mother said; "but see your father, Mary, how he halts, as he comes leaning on Sir Francis Walsingham's arm. He has the mien of a man many a year older than he is, if age be counted by years."

"Dear father!" Mary said, with a sigh. "But now, watch Robert and Thomas. They are each leading a lady to the ballroom. Little Tom, as I must still call him, looks well. He is all agog to be off with Philip; he must tarry till the winter is over. Robert is of a stronger build, and can weather the frosts and bitter cold of the Low Countries."

Lady Pembroke was now watching another couple who were passing on to the ballroom. The Earl of Leicester had often been attracted by the beauty of Lucy Forrester, and had now done her the honour of begging her to dance with him. But Lucy shrank from the open admiration and flattery of this brilliant courtier. While others were looking on her with envy, jealous of the distinction the Earl had conferred upon her, Lucy hoped she might meet her mistress, and excuse herself from the dance by saying her presence was needed by Lady Pembroke. But those who sat behind the screen were unseen, and Lucy did not know how near she was to her mistress.

Presently George Ratcliffe came towards the screen with gigantic strides, his brow dark, biting his lower lip, while his hand rested on the hilt of his short sword.

"Pardon me, dear mother," Lady Pembroke said, as she rose from her seat, "I will return anon," and then she stepped up to George, saying,—

“Have you danced this evening, Master Ratcliffe? Come with me, and let me find you a partner.”

George blushed crimson at the honour done him; he was no courtier, and the thanks he would fain have spoken died on his lips.

“I have been desiring to speak with you,” Lady Pembroke said; “I would fain know if aught has been heard of Mistress Gifford.”

“Nay, Madam, not of late. She was in good health of body last summer, though sore at heart; so my brother said.”

“No trace of her boy yet, I grieve to hear,” Lady Pembroke exclaimed. “If he is to be tracked out, your good brother will do it. You do not follow Sir Philip to the Netherlands, I think.”

“Nay, Madam, I stay at home, my mother is sick, and the care of the place falls on me heavily enow.”

When Lucy saw Lady Pembroke she disengaged her hand from the Earl’s, and said,—

“May it please you, my Lord, to permit me to go to my Lady, she may be seeking me.”

“Now why so cruel?” the Earl rejoined; “why cannot you give me one smile? Do not reserve all your favour for yonder young country-bred giant, whom my sister has chosen to patronise.”

But Lucy was resolute, her colour rose at this reference to George, and, with a profound curtsy, she left the Earl’s side and joined the Countess.

“Ah, Lucy, you are in time to give Master George your hand for a Saraband, and I will find my uncle, the Earl, another partner, even myself,” she added, laughing.

It was all done so quickly that George could scarcely realise what had happened.

He had been faithful to his first love, and never for a moment faltered in his allegiance.

Both brothers were, it may be, exceptional in the steadfastness of their loyalty to the two sisters. But Humphrey's position was widely different from that of his brother, and he had many interests and friends, yes, and flirtations and passing likings also, which prevented his thoughts from dwelling so continually upon Mary Gifford. Moreover, he knew the gulf set between them was impassable, and she was really more, as he said, like a saint out of his reach, than a woman of everyday life, whom he longed to make his wife.

George, on his hill-top, with no companion but his querulous mother—Mrs. Ratcliffe was for ever harping on his folly in suffering his cousin Dorothy, with her full money-bags, to slip through his fingers, to bless the draper's son in the Chepe with what would have been so valuable to him and to her—was far more to be pitied; and it was no wonder that he withdrew more and more into himself, and grew somewhat morose and gruff in his manner.

It was something to watch for Lady Pembroke's visits to Penshurst, when Lucy would at least appear with the household at church, but these visits only left him more hopeless than before.

His only consolation was that, although Lucy would not listen to his suit, she apparently favoured no one else.

George was conscious of a change in her; she was no longer the gay, careless maiden of years gone by,

no longer full of jests, teasing ways, and laughter, but a dignified lady, held in high esteem in the Countess of Pembroke's household; and, alas! further from him than ever.

In the dance to which George led Lucy, they found themselves opposite to Humphrey and one of the younger members of the Countess's household.

A bright, blue-eyed, laughing girl, who rallied Lucy on her sedate behaviour, and the profound curtseys she made to her partner, instead of the pirouette which she performed with Humphrey, his arm round her waist, and her little feet twinkling under the short skirt of her stiff brocade, like birds on the wing.

When the dance was over, George said,—

“The air is hot and fevered in this room; will you take a stroll with me, Mistress Lucy, in the gallery? or is it too great a favour to ask at your hands?”

“Nay, no favour,” Lucy replied; “I shall be as well pleased as you are to leave the ballroom.”

So they went together through the gallery, where, now and again, they saw couples engrossed with each other's company in the deep recesses of the windows.

The young moon hung like a silver bow in the clear sky, and from this window the church tower was seen beyond the pleasance, and the outline of the trees, behind which the moon was hastening to sink in the western heavens.

As Lucy gazed upon the scene before her, her large wistful eyes had in them that look which, in days gone by, George had never seen there.

The dim light of a lamp hanging in the recess shone on Lucy's face, and poor George felt something

he could not have put into words, separating him from the one love of his life. His thoughts suddenly went back to that spring evening when Lucy, in her terror, had rushed to him for protection. He recalled the sweetness of that moment, as a man perishing for thirst remembers the draught of pure water from the wayside fountain, of which he had scarcely appreciated the value, when he held it to his lips.

A deep sigh made Lucy turn towards him, and, to his surprise, she opened the very subject which he had been struggling in vain to find courage to begin.

"George," she said, "it would make me so happy if you could forget me, and think of someone who could, and would, I doubt not, gladly return your love."

"If that is all you can say to me," he answered gruffly, "I would ask you to hold your peace. How can I forget at your bidding? it is folly to ask me to do so."

"George," Lucy said, and her voice was tremulous, so tremulous that George felt a hope springing up in his heart.—"George, it makes me unhappy when I think of you living alone with your mother, and—"

"You could change all that without delay, you know you could. I can't give you a home and all the fine things you have at Wilton—"

"As if that had aught to do with it," she said. "I do not care for fine things now; once I lived for them; that is over."

"You love books, if not fine things," he went on, gathering courage as he felt Lucy, at any rate, could think with some concern, that he was lonely and unhappy. "You care for books. I have saved money,

and bought all I could lay my hand on at the shop in Paul's Churchyard. More than this, I have tried to learn myself, and picked up my old Latin, that I got at Tunbridge School. Yes, and there is a room at Hillside I call my lady's chamber. I put the books there, and quills and parchment; and I have got some picture tapestry for the walls, and stored a cupboard with bits of silver, and—"

"Oh! George, you are too good, too faithful," Lucy exclaimed. "I am not worthy; you do not really know me." And, touched with the infinite pathos of George's voice, as he recounted all he had done in hope, for her pleasure, Lucy had much ado to keep back her tears. Then there was silence, more eloquent than words.

At last Lucy put her hand gently on George's arm.

"Hearken, George," she said; "if the day should ever dawn when I can come to you with a true heart, I *will* come. But this is not yet, and I should wrong a noble love like yours if I gave you in return a poor and mean affection, unworthy of your devotion. Do you understand me, George?"

"No," he said, "no, but I am fain to believe in you, and I will wait. Only," he added, with sudden vehemence, "give me one promise—do not let me hear by chance that you have become the wife of another man; give me fair warning, or I swear, if the blow should fall unawares, it would kill me or drive me mad."

"You will never hear the news of which you speak, and in this rest content. I have neither desire nor intention of wedding with any man. Let that suffice."

George drew himself up to his full height and said formally,—

“It shall suffice, so help me God.”

In all great assemblies like that which had gathered at Penshurst on this November day, there are often hidden romances, and chapters rehearsed in individual lives, of which the majority know nor care nothing. Who amongst that throng of courtly ladies and gay gentlemen knew aught of George Ratcliffe's love story; and, if they had known, who would have cared? To the greater number the whole thing would have seemed a fit subject for jest, perhaps of ridicule, for self-forgetting love, which has nothing to feed on, and no consolation except in nursing vain hopes for the fulfilment of the heart's desire, does not appeal to the sympathy of the multitude. Such chivalrous, steadfast love was not unknown in the days of Queen Elizabeth, nor is it unknown in the days of Queen Victoria. It left no record behind it then, nor will it leave a record now. It is amongst the hidden treasures, which are never, perhaps, to see the light of day; but it is a treasure, nevertheless; and who shall say that it may not shine in a purer atmosphere and gain hereafter the meed of praise it neither sought for nor found here?

There was much stir and bustle in the President's Court at Penshurst's the next morning. The gateway tower had just been completed by Sir Henry Sidney on the old foundations, which dated from the thirteenth century. And now, from under its shadow, on this still November morning, the “light of Sir Henry's family” was to ride out with a large retinue to take up the high

position granted him by the Queen as Governor of Flushing. How young he looked as he sat erect on his noble horse, scanning his men, whose names were called by his sergeant-at-arms as they answered one by one in deep, sonorous tones to the roll call. Drawn up on either side of the court, it was a goodly display of brave, stalwart followers, all faithful servants of the house of Sidney, bearing their badge on their arm, and the boar and porcupine on the helmets.

The Earl of Leicester was by his nephew's side, and his gentlemen and esquires in attendance in brilliant array, for Robert, Earl of Leicester, loved display, and nothing could be more gorgeous than the trappings of his own horse, nor the dazzling armour which he wore.

In the background, under the main entrance of the house, Sir Henry Sidney and Lady Mary stood with the Earl and Countess of Pembroke, and Dame Frances Sidney, leaning on the arm of her father, Sir Francis Walsingham. So fair and young she looked that all hearts went out in sympathy with her, for she was very pale, and she was evidently trying to control herself, and let her husband's last look be answered by smiles rather than tears.

Sir Philip had bidden his good-bye to those to whom he was so dear in private, and there was a general determination amongst everyone to be brave and repress any demonstration of sadness at the last moment. And indeed the splendid military career opening before Sir Philip was a joy in the hearts of many who loved him, which silenced any expression of grief at his loss to themselves.

Humphrey Ratcliffe, in command of his men, presently left the ranks, and, approaching Sir Philip, said,—

“We await the word of command to start, sir,”

Just at this moment the feeble cry of an infant was heard. And Sir Philip, throwing the reins to his esquire, said to the Earl,—

“Your pardon, my lord, if I delay for one moment,” and then, with a quick, springing step, Sir Philip returned to the entrance, where his little daughter had just been brought by her nurse. “Nay, then, my lady Elizabeth,” he said, “it would ill-beseem me to forget to bid you farewell,” and, taking the child in his arms, he kissed her twice on the little puckered forehead, saying, “Go for comfort to your sweet mother,” as he put her into his wife’s arms, “and God bring you both safe to me ere long.”

In another moment he had again sprung on the saddle, and, with a last look at the group collected under the porch, he rode away with all that gallant company, with high hopes and courage to follow where their great chief led them.

Some of the guests departed in the afternoon of the day to sleep at Tunbridge, but Sir Fulke Greville remained at the request of Lady Pembroke.

There was no one to whom she could so freely speak of her brother, sure of his sympathy, as to Sir Fulke Greville.

Perhaps no one, except herself, had such an intimate knowledge of the depth of his learning and the wonderful versatility of his gifts.

.21S. .21S.

ST2 *ST2* *ST2

S. .21S. .21S. .21S.

The beech wood was Lady Pembroke's favourite resort at all seasons when at Penshurst. It was there she had many a time played with Sir Philip as a child, and taken sweet converse with him in later years. Here many of his poems had been rehearsed to his sister before ever they had been written on paper.

It was in the profound stillness of the November noontide that Lady Pembroke invited Sir Fulke Greville to cross the park and wander with her in the familiar paths through the beech wood.

The leaves were falling silently from the branches overhead, adding one by one their tribute to the thick bronze carpet which had been lying at the feet of the stately trees for many a long year.

The gentle rustle of a bird as it flew from the thinning branches, the soft sigh of a faint breeze as it whispered its message of decay to the trees, the gentle trill of a robin at intervals, were the only sounds that fell upon the ear as Lady Pembroke and Sir Fulke Greville spoke of him who was uppermost in their thoughts.

"It is a splendid career for him, doubtless," Sir Fulke was saying, "and marvellous that one so young should be thus distinguished as to be set over the heads of so many who would fain have been chosen. But no man living excites less jealousy than Sir Philip; jealousy and scorn and mistrust die in his presence."

"Yes," Lady Pembroke said, "that is true. Yet I would that I felt more secure as to my Uncle Leicester's attitude towards my brother. I scarce can feel his praise is whole-hearted. Maybe it is too much to expect that it should be as fervent as that of others."

"The Earl is appointed Commander-in-Chief of the whole force. Sure that is honour enough, and the sooner he hastens thither the better. He is gone to dally at Court and trifle with the Queen as of old. When I see these middle-aged folk, Queen and courtier, posing as lovers and indulging in youthful follies, I ask myself, will it be so with me? shall I dance attendance on fair ladies when I have told out near fifty years of life? I hope not."

Lady Pembroke laughed.

"There is no fear, methinks, for you or Philip; but, after all, it is the heart which keeps us really young, despite age, yes, and infirmity. Philip, as he rode forth this morning, looked as young, methinks, as when on the first expedition he went to Paris, when scarce eighteen years had passed over his head."

"That is true," Sir Fulke answered, "and none can look at Philip now without seeing that happiness has the effect of renewing youth."

"Yes," Lady Pembroke said; "he is happy, as he could not be while that hunger for forbidden fruit was upon him. At times I am tempted to wish Frances had more tastes in sympathy with her husband, but one cannot have all that is desired for them we love, and she is as loving a wife as any man ever possessed. But, tell me sure, how fares it with the young trio of scholars? Has aught come lately from your pens? and does the sage Harvey yet rule over your metres, and render your verses after ancient model?"

"Nay, we have withdrawn from the good old man's too overbearing rule. As you must know, Sir Philip has written an admirable *Defence of Poesie*, and he

there is the advocate for greater simplicity of expression. We have had too much of copies from Italian models."

"The Italians vary in merit," Lady Pembroke said. "Sure Dante rises to the sublime, and Philip has been of late a devout student of the *Vita Nuova*, and caught the spirit of that mighty genius who followed Beatrice from depths of hell to heights of Paradise."

"Yes, I have had the same feeling about Sir Philip which you express," Sir Fulke Greville said. "Dante has raised love far above mere earthly passion to a religion, which can worship the pure and the spiritual rather than the mere beauty of the bodily presence. This breathes in much of Philip's later verse. You know how he says he obeyed the muse, who bid him 'look in his heart, and write, rather than go outside for models of construction.' That great work—great work of yours and Sir Philip, the *Arcadia*—teams with beauties, and Pamela is the embodiment of pure and noble womanhood."

"Ah!" Lady Pembroke said, "my brother and I look forward to a time of leisure and retirement, when we will recast that lengthy romance, and compress it into narrower limits. We know full well it bears the stamp of inexperience, and there is much concerning Philoclea that we shall expunge. But that time of retirement!" Lady Pembroke said, "it seems a mockery to speak of it, now that the chief author has just left us to plunge into the very thick of the battle of life."

"I am well pleased," Sir Fulke said, "that Sir Philip should have so able a secretary at his elbow—Mr. William Temple. The scholar's element will be a refreshment to Philip when the cares of government press

heavily. Mr. William Temple's *Dialectics* is dedicated, with no empty profession of respect and affection, to one who has ever been his friend. Forsooth," Sir Fulke Greville said, "friends, true and loyal to your brother, Madam, are as numerous as the leaves that rustle under our feet."

"Yes," Lady Pembroke said; "that is a consoling thought; and he goes to friends, if one may judge by the terms Count Maurice of Nassau writes of him to the English Ambassador, Master Davison. My father has shown me a copy of that letter, which speaks of Philip as his noble brother, and honoured companion-in-arms."

"How proud one of the chiefest of the friends you speak of would be could he know that Philip is gone forth to wage war against Spain."

"Good Hubert Languet! I always think no man in his first youth had ever a truer and more faithful counsellor than Philip possessed in that noble old Huguenot. And how he loved him, and mourned his loss!"

The big bell was now sounding for the mid-day dinner, and Lady Pembroke said,—

"However unwillingly, we must break off our converse now. You will write to me if you repair to Flushing; or you will find a welcome at Wilton on any day when you would fain bend your steps thither. Philip's friend must needs be mine."

"A double honour I cannot rate too highly," was the reply. "I will ever do my best to prove worthy of it."

CHAPTER XII.

FIRE AND SWORD.

“What love hath wrought
Is dearly bought.”—*Old Song*, 1596.

MARY GIFFORD had found a quiet resting-place in the house of her husband's uncle, Master George Gifford, at Arnhem, and here, from time to time, she was visited by Humphrey Ratcliffe, who, in all the tumult of the war, kept well in view the quest for Mary's lost son.

Again and again hope had been raised that he was in one of the Popish centres which were scattered over the Low Countries.

Once Mary had been taken, under Humphrey's care, to watch before the gates of a retired house in a village near Arnhem, whence the scholars of a Jesuit school sometimes passed out for exercise.

For the Papists were under protection of the Spanish forces, and were far safer than their Protestant neighbours. Spain had always spies on the watch, and armed men ready in ambush to resent any interference with the priests or Jesuit schools.

The country was bristling with soldiers, and skirmishes were frequent between the English and Spaniards. Treachery and secret machinations were always the tactics of Spain, and the bolder and more open hos-

tility of Elizabeth's army was often defeated by cunning.

Mary Gifford's expedition to the little town had resulted in disappointment. With eager eyes and a beating heart she had watched the boys file out in that back street towards the river, and when the boy passed whom, at a sign from Humphrey, she was especially to notice, she turned away. The light of hope died out from her face, as she said,—

"Ah! no, no! That boy is not my Ambrose!"

"He will be changed, whenever you do find him, Mistress Gifford," Humphrey said, somewhat unwilling to give up his point. "Methinks that stripling has as much likeness to the child of scarce seven years old as you may expect to find."

"Nay," Mary said. "The eyes, if nought else, set the question at rest. Did you not note how small and deep-set were the eyes which this boy turned on us with a sly glance as he passed. My Ambrose had ever a bold, free glance, with his big, lustrous eyes, not a sidelong, foxy look. Nay, my good friend, the truth gets more and more fixed in my mind that my child is safe in Paradise, where only I shall meet him in God's good time."

"I do not give up hope," Humphrey said. "This is certain, that he was at first at Douay, and that his father took him thence to some hiding-place in the Netherlands. He may be nearer you than you think. I shall not have the chance of speaking much to you for some weeks," Humphrey said. "It may be never again, for our great chief, Sir Philip, weary of inaction and sick at heart by the constant thwarts and draw-

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backs which he endures, is consorting with the Count Maurice of Nassau, and both are determined to capture Axel. The scheme has to be submitted to the Earl of Leicester, and we only await his assent to prepare for the onset, and, by God's help, we will take the town. Sir Philip craves for some chance of showing what he can do. He is crippled for money and resources, and, moreover, the loss of both his parents weighs heavy upon him."

"Alas! I know this must needs do so, the losses following so close, one on the steps of the other."

"I have had a letter of some length from Lucy concerning Sir Henry's death at Ludlow, and I look for another ere long with a fuller account than as yet I have received of the Lady Mary's departure."

"Verily, there is only one staff to lean on as we pass through the valley of the shadow when all human help is vain. None need be lonely who can feel the presence of the Lord near in life and death. We must all seek to feel that presence with us."

"Alas!" Humphrey said, "this is a hard matter. It is many a year now since I have ventured to put the question. Do you still hold to the belief that your husband lives?"

"Yes," Mary said firmly, "till certain news reaches me that he is dead."

They were at the door of Master Gifford's house now, and here they parted—Humphrey to the active service which would make him forget for the time the hopelessness of his quest for the boy Ambrose and his love for the mother.

Lucy Forrester had acquired, amongst other things

in Lady Pembroke's service, the art of writing well, and she kept up communication with her sister by this means. These letters were often sent, by favour of the Earl of Pembroke, in the despatches to Sir Philip Sidney or the Earl of Leicester, and conveyed to Mary Gifford by his servants.

One of these letters awaited Mary this evening on her return, and it was lying on the table by Master Gifford's side, as he sat in the spotlessly clean parlour, with the Bible open before him, and a sheet of parchment, on which he was jotting down the heads of his sermon to be delivered next day in the plain unadorned room at the back of his house at Arnhem.

Master George Gifford was a fine and venerable-looking man, with abundance of grey hair curling low over the stiff, white collar, which contrasted with the sombre black of his long gown made of coarse homespun.

He had escaped to Holland in the days of the persecution of Protestants in England, and, having a natural gift of eloquence, had become the centre and stay of a little band of faithful followers of the Reformed Faith.

But Master Gifford was no narrow-minded bigot, and he abhorred persecution on the plea of religion, as utterly at variance with the Gospel of the One Lord and Saviour of all men.

He was a dignified, courteous man, and treated Mary with the tender consideration which her forlorn condition seemed to demand. Amongst those who at intervals attended his ministry was Sir Philip Sidney, and, on this very day when Mary Gifford had been on

her vain expedition to the little out-of-the-way village on the river bank, the young soldier had come to lay before him the scheme for attacking Axel, and had brought with him the letter which, on Mary's entrance, Master Gifford held towards her.

"Here is a welcome missive," he said; "but forsooth, my poor child, you look worn and tired. Sit you down and rest. Gretchen has spread the board for you; I supped an hour ago. No news, I take it, Mary?" Master Gifford said.

"No, no, dear uncle, and I can go on no more vain quests. Master Humphrey has the best intention, and who but a mother could recognise her own child? I fear me you have needed my help with distributing the alms to the poor this afternoon, and I should have baked the pasty for the morrow's dinner."

"Gretchen has done all that was needful. Is it not so, good Gretchen?" said Master Gifford, as a squarely-built, sandy-haired Dutch woman, in her short blue gown and large brown linen apron, and huge flapping cap came into the room.

Gretchen came forward to Mary with resolute steps, and said in her somewhat eccentric English,—

"And what must you tire yourself out like this for, Mistress Gifford? Tut, tut, you look like a ghost. Come and eat your supper like a Christian, I tell you."

Gretchen was a rough diamond, but she had a good heart. She was absolutely devoted to her master, and with her husband, an Englishman, who had escaped with his master as a boy many years before, served him with zeal and loyalty.

Mary was led, whether she wished it or not, to the

kitchen—that bright kitchen with its well-kept pots and pans, and its heavy delf-ware ranged on shelves, its great Dutch clock ticking loudly in the corner, and the clear fire burning merrily in the stove, which was flanked with blue and white tiles with a variety of quaint devices.

“Sit you down and eat this posset. I made it for you, knowing you would be more dead than alive. Come now, and sip this cup of mead, and don’t open that letter till you have done. Take off your hood and cloak. There! now you are better already. Give up yawning like that, Jan, or you’ll set me off,” Gretchen said to her husband, whose name she had changed, to suit the country of his adoption, from John to Jan, and who had been taking a comfortable nap on the settle by the stove, from which he had been rudely awakened by his wife.

Mary was obliged to do as Gretchen bid her, and was constrained to acknowledge that she felt the better for the food, of which she had been so unwilling to partake.

Master Gifford’s house was frequented by many faithful Puritans in Arnheim, and amongst them was a lady named Gruithuissens, who was well-known for her benevolence and tender sympathy with all who were sorrowful and oppressed.

As was natural, therefore, she was attracted by Mary Gifford, and her friendship had been one of the compensations Mary felt God had granted her for the ever present loss of her boy.

Madam Gruithuissens’ house faced the street on one side and overlooked the river on the other. The

window of her long, spacious parlour opened out upon a verandah, and had a typical view of the Low Countries stretched before them. A wide, far-reaching expanse of meadow-land and water—the flat country vanishing in the sky-line many miles distant.

A contrast, indeed, to the wood-covered heights and undulating pastures of the fair country of Kent, where the home of the Sidneys stands in all its stately time-honoured pride.

Mary Gifford's thoughts were there at this moment. A summer evening came back to her when she sat at the casement of Ford Manor with Ambrose clasped close to her side. The years that lay between that time and the present seemed so short, and yet how they had probably changed the child whom she had loved so dearly.

Humphrey Ratcliffe was right. She had not realised what that change would be. And then came the ever-haunting fear that Ambrose, if he were alive, would fail to recognise his mother—might have been taught to forget her, or, perhaps, to think lightly of her, and to look upon her as a heretic, by the Jesuits who had brought him up in their creed.

She was roused from her meditations by Mistress Gruithuissens' abrupt entrance.

"Great news!" she said, "Great news! Axel is taken, and Sir Philip Sidney has done wonders. A messenger has just arrived with the news at the Earl of Leicester's quarters, and Master Humphrey Ratcliffe has been sent by barge with others of the wounded. There has been great slaughter, and terrible it is to think of the aching hearts all around us. Women

widows, children fatherless. Yet it is a righteous war, for Spain would massacre tenfold the number did she gain the ascendant—hearken! I hear footsteps.”

In another moment the door was partly thrown open, and a young soldier, evidently fresh from the scene of action, came in.

“I am seeking Mistress Gifford,” he said. “I am esquire to Master Humphrey Ratcliffe, and he has dispatched me with a message.”

“I am Mistress Gifford,” Mary said. “What is your news?”

“My master is wounded, and he lies in Sir Philip Sidney’s quarters in the garrison. He bids me say he would fain see you, for he has to tell you somewhat that could be entrusted to no one but yourself.”

“How can I go to him?” Mary said helplessly.

“How? With me, and my servants to guard us. But do not look so terror-struck, Mistress Gifford,” Madam Gruithuissens said, “it may, perchance, be good news. I will order the servants to make ready—or will we wait till the morrow? Nay, I see that would tax your patience too far; we will start at once.”

As Mary Gifford and her new protectress passed through the streets of Arnhem to the garrison where Humphrey lay wounded, they saw knots of people collected, all talking of the great event of the taking of Axel. Some women were weeping and unable to gain any exact information, most of them with a look of stolid misery on their faces, with no passionate expression of grief, as would have been seen in a like case amongst Italian and French women, or even amongst English sufferers in the same circumstances.

Mary Gifford's ear had become accustomed to the Dutch language, and she spoke it with comparative ease, having, in her visits of charity amongst the poor of Master Gifford's followers and disciples, no other means of communicating with them.

Madam Gruithuissens spoke English, for, like so many of those who sought safety in the Low Countries from the persecution of the Papists in England, she had been brought thither by her father as a child, and had, till her marriage, spoken her native tongue, and had read much of the literature which was brought over from England.

Humphrey Ratcliffe was lying in a small chamber apart from other sufferers, by Sir Philip's order. He was wounded in the shoulder, and faint from the loss of blood.

Mary Gifford did not lose her self-control in an emergency. Like many gentle, quiet women, her strength and courage were always ready when she needed them.

"I am grieved to see you thus," Mary said, as she went up to the low pallet where Humphrey lay.

"It is nought but a scratch," he said, "and it has been well worth the gaining in a noble cause and a grand victory. I have certain news of your boy. He was in a Jesuit school. It was burnt to the ground, but the boy was saved. In the confusion and uproar, with the flames scorching hot on us, I felt pity for the young creatures who were seen struggling in the burning mass. With the help of my brave companions I rescued three of the boys. I was bearing off one to a place of safety when I felt a blow from behind. This

stab in my shoulder, and the pain, made me relax my hold of the boy.

"Instantly one of the Jesuit brothers had seized him, saying,—

"You are safe, Ambrose, with me."

"I knew no more. I swooned from pain and loss of blood, and, when I came to, I found I was in a barge being brought hither with other of the wounded."

"But my son!" Mary exclaimed. "Are you sure it was my son?"

"As sure as I can be of aught that my eyes have ever looked upon. I saw the large eyes you speak of dilated with fear, as the flames leaped up in the surrounding darkness. And I verily believe the man who tore him from me was him who gave me this wound, and is the crafty wretch whom you know to be your husband."

"Ah me!" Mary exclaimed, "it is but poor comfort after all. My boy may be near, but I can never see him; he who has him in his power will take care he eludes our grasp. But I am selfish and ungrateful to you, my good friend. Pardon me if I seem to forget you got that sore wound in my service."

"Ah! Mary," Humphrey said, "I would suffer ten such wounds gladly if I might but win my guerdon. Well for me, it may be, that I swooned, or, by Heaven, I should have run that wily Jesuit through the body."

"Thank God," Mary said fervently, "that his blood lies not on your head."

Madam Gruithuissens had considerately withdrawn to a long, low chamber next the small one where Humphrey lay. She knew enough of Mary Gifford's history

to feel that whatever Humphrey Ratcliffe had to say to her, he would prefer to say it with no listeners.

And, full of charity and kindness, the good lady moved about amongst the wounded and dying, and tried to cheer them and support them in their pain, by repeating passages from the Bible, in English or in Dutch, according to the nationality of the sufferer.

When Madam Gruithuissens returned to Humphrey's room, Mary said,—

“I would fain watch here all night, and do my utmost for all the sufferers. Will you, Madam, give my uncle notice of my intention, and I think he will come hither and pray by the side of those whom I hear groaning in their pain.”

“I will e'en do as you wish, and send my servant back with cordials and linen for bands, and such food as may support you in your watch.”

When Madam Gruithuissens departed, Humphrey and Mary Gifford were alone together. The servant who had been sent with the news keeping watch at the door outside, and Humphrey, for the time, seemed to go over, half unconsciously, the scenes of the taking of Axel, and Mary listened to it not exactly with half-hearted sympathy, but with the perpetually recurring cry at her heart that God would restore to her her only son.

It is ever so—the one anxiety, the one centre of interest to ourselves, which may seem of little importance to others, drives out all else. All other cares and griefs, and grand achievements of which we hear, are but as dust in the balance, when weighed down by our own

especial sorrow, or suspense is hardest, perhaps, to bear, which is pressing upon us at the time.

Mary Gifford had often told herself that hope was dead within her, and that she had resigned her boy into God's hands, that she should never clasp him in her arms again, nor look into those lustrous eyes of which she had spoken to Humphrey. But hope is slow to die in human hearts. It springs up again from the very ashes of despair, and Humphrey Ratcliffe's words had quickened it into life. Thus, as Humphrey described the events of the past forty-eight hours, and forgot pain and weariness in the enthusiasm for the courage and heroism of Sir Philip Sidney, his listener was picturing the blazing house, the flames, the suffocating smoke, and the boy whose face had been revealed to Humphrey as the face of her lost child.

She was haunted by the certainty that the man who had stabbed Humphrey was her husband, and that it was he who had called the boy by name, and snatched him from his deliverer.

This was the undercurrent of thought in Mary's mind, while she heard Humphrey describe to her uncle, who promptly obeyed the summons, the capture of the four citadels and rich spoil.

"Ours was but a little band," Humphrey was saying, "but three thousand foot soldiers. I was one of the five hundred of Sir Philip's men, and proud am I to say so. It was at his place we met, on the water in front of Flushing, and then by boat and on foot, with stealthy tread lest we should disturb the sleepers.

"Within a mile of Axel Sir Philip called us near, and may I never live to forget his words. They were

enow to set on fire the courage of all true soldiers. He bade us remember it was God's battle we were fighting, for Queen and country and for our Faith. He bade us remember, too, we were waging war against the tyranny of Spain, and exhorted us to care nought for danger or death in serving the Queen, furthering our country's honour, and helping a people so grievously in want of aid. He said, moreover, that his eye was upon us, and none who fought bravely should lose their reward.

"I thank God I was one of the forty men, who, headed by our gallant leader, jumped into the turbid waters of the ditch, swam across, and, scaling the walls, opened the gate for the rest.

"The men we attacked were brave, and fought hard for victory; but they were but just roused from slumber, it was too late to resist, and Sir Philip had, by his marvellous wisdom in placing the troops, ensured our success. It was a fearful scene of carnage. I only grieve that I did not get my wound in fair fight, but by the back-handed blow of a Jesuit. Some of our men set fire to the house where those emissaries of the devil congregate, and Mistress Gifford here knows the rest, and she will relate it to you, Master Gifford, in due time."

"Ah, my son," Master Gifford said, "let us pray for the blessed time when the nations shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning-hooks, and learn war no more."

"But it is a righteous war, sir, blessed by God. Sure, could you have heard Sir Philip bid us remember this, you would not soon forget his words, his voice, his gallant bearing. He is ever in the front rank of danger,

nor spares himself, as it is reported some other great ones are known to do. And his brothers are not far behind him in valour. That slight stripling, Mr. Thomas Sidney, is a very David in the heat of the battle."

"Let us try to dismiss the dread conflict from our minds," Master Gifford said, "while we supplicate our Father in Heaven that He would look with eyes of pity and forgiveness on the wounded and the dying, the bereaved widows and the fatherless children."

And then the good old man poured out his soul in prayer as he knelt by Humphrey's side. His words seemed to have a composing effect on Humphrey; and when Master Gifford left the room to go to the bedside of the other sufferers in the adjoining chamber, Mary saw, to her great relief, that Humphrey was sleeping soundly.

CHAPTER XIII.

RESTORED.

“Good hope upholds the heart.”

Old Song, 1596.

THERE were great rejoicings at Arnhem when Sir Philip Sidney came back to join the main army, stationed there under the command of the Earl of Leicester.

Sir Philip had been appointed Colonel of the Zealand regiment of horse and, to the disappointment of his friends, the Queen chose to be offended that this mark of honour had been conferred upon him.

The character of the Queen was full of surprising inconsistencies, and it seems incredible that she should have grudged one whom she called the gem of her Court the honour which she actually wished conferred on Count Hohenlo, a man who, though a brave soldier, was known for his drunken, dissolute habits.

The Earl of Leicester made a jest of the Queen's displeasure, and only laughed at the concern Sir Francis Walsingham showed in the letter in which he announced it.

“Let it not disturb your peace,” the Earl said to Lady Frances, who, filled with pride in her husband's achievements, was depressed when she heard her father's report that the Queen laid the blame on Sir Philip's

ambition, and implied that he had wrung the honour from his uncle.

"Let it not disturb your peace," the Earl repeated, "any more than it does mine. It is but part and parcel of Her Highness's ways with those whom she would seem at times to think paragons. Do I not know it full well? I have said in my despatch the truth, and I have begged your father, sweet Frances, to communicate what I say without delay to the Queen; my words for sure will not count for nought."

"The Queen had not heard of the last grand victory, the taking of Axel, when she made the complaint. Ambitious! nay, my good uncle, Philip is never ambitious save for good."

The Earl stroked the fair cheek of Philip Sidney's young wife, saying,—

"Philip is happy in possessing so loyal a lady for his wife; he can afford to let the smiles or frowns of the Queen go by. And here he comes to attest the truth of what I say."

Sir Philip had often to doubt the ability of his uncle as a general, but at this time they were on terms of greater friendliness than ever before. Sir Philip had, in a few short months, lost both father and mother, and he probably felt the tie between him and his mother's brother to be stronger than in former times. Had not his mother often bid him remember that he came of the noble race of Dudley, and that he bore their crest with that of the Sidneys—a proud distinction.

If there had been jealousy in the Earl's heart when he saw his nephew rising so rapidly to a foremost place in the esteem of all men—a place which, with all his

brilliant gifts, he secretly felt he never had filled—it was subdued now.

He did not grudge him the praise his splendid achievement awoke, and, in his despatch to the English Court, he gave the whole credit of the capture of Axel to his nephew.

The Earl always took care to have the room he inhabited, whether for a longer or a shorter time, luxuriously furnished.

If the word “comfortable” does not apply to the appointments of those days, there was abundance of grandeur in fine tapestry hangings, in soft-cushioned seats, and in gold and silver plate on which the delicacies that were attainable were served.

Sir Philip and Lady Frances were the Earl’s guests, with the young Earl of Essex and Mr. Thomas Sidney. The elder brother, Robert, had been left in command at Flushing with the nine hundred trusty soldiers Sir Philip had left in the garrison there.

“What truth am I to attest?” Sir Philip asked, as he came up the room with his quick, elastic step.

His wife went forward to meet him, and, clinging to his arm, said,—

“Our good uncle was consoling me for those words in my father’s letter.”

“And on what ground did I console you, Frances?” the Earl said. “You give but half the truth; go on to say the rest.”

“Nay,” she said, hiding her face on Sir Philip’s shoulder, as he put his arm tenderly round her. “Nay, there is no need—”

"To tell him he is happy to possess a loyal wife? You are right, dear niece; he knows it full well."

"Ay, to my joy and blessing," was the answer. "The favour of the Queen is, I do not deny, precious; but there are things more precious even than that. But, Frances, I come to tell you I think it is time we return to Flushing. We have had many bright days here, but I must soon be at the work I came hither to perform, and there is much to do, as you, my Lord, know full well."

"Ay, surely, but we need not be rash, or in too great haste."

"The investment of Doesburg is imperative," Sir Philip said, "and, if we wish to gain the mastery of the Yssel, this must be done. There are some matters which cause me great uneasiness. Stores are short and money greatly needed; nor do I put much faith in some of our allies. There is a mutinous feeling abroad amongst the troops."

"You may be right," the Earl said, "but let us away to our supper, it must needs be served, and afterwards you shall take the viol, and chase away any needless fears by your sweet music."

The Earl was always ready to put away any grave or serious matter, and Sir Philip was often hampered by the difficulty he found in bringing his uncle to the point on any question of importance.

When Sir Philip and Lady Frances were alone together that evening, he seemed more than usually grave and even sad.

"Are you grieved, Philip, about the Queen's dis-

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pleasure? As soon as she hears of Axel she will sure cover you with honours."

"Nay, sweetheart, it is not over this matter that I am brooding. Concern for you is pressing most."

"For me! But I am merry and well."

"Will you choose to remain here at Arnheim or return to Flushing with me? A sore struggle must ensue before long, and Zutphen will be besieged. I have been meditating whether or not I ought to send you and our babe under safe convoy to England."

"No—oh, no! I would fain stay with you—near you—especially now. My ladies take good care of me, and little madam Elizabeth. She is well and hearty, and so am I; do not send us away from you!"

"It shall be as you wish, dear love," was the answer; "though, I fear, you will see but little of me. I have much to occupy me. But I will come to you for rest, dear heart, and I shall not come in vain."

In all the events and chances of war, Sir Philip did not forget his servants; and he had been greatly concerned at the wound Humphrey had received, which had been slow to heal, and had been more serious than had at first been supposed. Before leaving Arnheim, Sir Philip went to the house of Madam Gruithuissens, whither Humphrey had been conveyed when able to leave the room in the quarters allotted to Sir Philip's retainers, where he was nursed and tended by Mary Gifford and his kind and benevolent hostess.

Humphrey had chafed against his enforced inaction, and was eager to be allowed to resume his usual duties. It was evident that he was still unfit for this; and Sir Philip entirely supported Madam Gruithuissens when

she said it would be madness for him to attempt to mount his horse while the wound was unhealed and constantly needed care.

It was the evening before Sir Philip left Arnheim that he was met in the square entry of Madam Gruithuisen's house by Mary Gifford. She had been reading to Humphrey, and had been trying to divert his mind from the sore disappointment which the decision that he was to stay in Arnheim had occasioned him. But Humphrey, like most masculine invalids, was very hard to persuade, or to manage, and Mary, feeling that his condition was really the result of his efforts to save her boy and bring him to her, was full of pity for him, and self-reproach that she had caused him so much pain and vexation.

"How fares it with my good esquire, Mistress Gifford?" Sir Philip asked, as he greeted Mary.

"Indeed, sir, but ill; and I fear that to prevent his joining your company may hurt him more than suffering him to have his way. He is also greatly distressed that he could not prosecute inquiries at Axel for my child. In good sooth, Sir Philip, I have brought upon my true friend nought but ill. I am oftentimes tempted to wish he had never seen me."

"Nay, Mistress Gifford, do not indulge that wish. I hold to the faith that the love of one who is pure and good can but be a boon, whether or not possession of that one be denied or granted."

"But, sir, you know my story—you know that between me and Master Ratcliffe is a dividing wall which neither can pass."

"Yes, I know it," Sir Philip said; "but, Mistress

Gifford, take courage. The wall may be broken down and his allegiance be rewarded at last."

"Yet, how dare I wish or pray that so it should be, sir? No; God's hand is heavy upon me—bereft of my boy, and tossed hither and thither as a ship on a stormy sea. All that is left for me is to bow my head and strive to say, 'God's will be done.'"

It was seldom that Mary Gifford gave utterance to her inmost thoughts; seldom that she confessed even to herself how deeply rooted in her heart was her love for Humphrey Ratcliffe. She never forgot, to her latest day, the look of perfect sympathy—yes, of understanding, which Sir Philip Sidney bent on her as he took her hand in his, and, bending over it, kissed it reverently.

"May God have you in His holy keeping, Mistress Gifford, and give you strength for every need."

"He understands me," Mary said, as she stood where he left her, his quick steps sounding on the tiled floor of the long corridor which opened from the square lobby. "He understands, he knows; for has he not tasted of a like cup bitter as mine?"

Mary Gifford was drawing her hood more closely over her face, preparing to return to Master Gifford's house, when she saw a man on the opposite side of the street who was evidently watching her.

Her heart beat fast as she saw him crossing over to the place where she stood on the threshold of the entry to Madam Gruithuissens' house.

She quickened her steps as she turned away in the direction of Master Gifford's house, but she felt a hand laid on her arm.

"I am speaking to one Mistress Gifford, methinks."

"Yes, sir," Mary said, her courage, as ever, rising when needed. "What is your business with me?"

"I am sent on an errand by one you know of as Ambrose Gifford—called by us Brother Ambrosio. He lies sick unto death in a desolate village before Zutphen, and he would fain see you ere he departs hence. There is not a moment to lose; you must come at once. I have a barge ready, and we can reach the place by water."

Mary was still hurrying forward, but the detaining grasp grew firmer.

"If I tell you that by coming you will see your son, will you consent?"

"My son! my boy!" Mary exclaimed. "I would traverse the world to find him, but how am I to know that you are not deceiving me?"

"I swear by the blessed Virgin and all the Saints I am telling you the truth. Come!"

"I must seek counsel. I must consider; do not press me."

"Your boy is lying also in the very jaws of death. A consuming fever has seized many of our fraternity. Famine has resulted in pestilence. When I left the place where Brother Ambrosio and the boy lie, it was doubtful which would depart first. The rites of the Holy Church have been administered, and the priest, who would fain shrive Brother Ambrosio, sent me hither, for confession must be made of sins, ere absolution be bestowed. If you wish to see your son alive you must not hesitate. It may concern you less if I tell you that he who was your husband may have departed unabsolved through your delay."

The twilight was deepening, and there were but few people in this quarter of the town. Mary hesitated no longer, and, with an uplifting of heart for the strength Sir Philip's parting blessing had invoked, she gathered the folds of her cloak round her, pulled the hood over her face, and saying, "Lead on, I am ready," she followed her guide through some narrow lanes leading to the brink of the water, where a barge was lying, with a man at the prow, evidently on the watch for their coming.

Not a word was spoken as Mary entered the barge, and took her seat on one of the benches laid across it, her guide leaving her unmolested and retiring to the further end of the vessel.

There was no sound but the monotonous splash of the oars, and their regular beat against the edge of the boat, as the two men pulled out into the wider part of the river.

Above, the stars were coming out one by one, and the wide stretch of low meadow-land and water lay in the purple haze of gathering shadows like an unknown and undiscovered country, till it was lost in the over-arching canopy of the dim far-off heavens.

Mary Gifford felt strangely indifferent to all outward things as she sat with her hands tightly clasped together under her cloak, and in her heart only one thought had room—that she was in a few short hours to clasp her boy in her arms.

So over-mastering was this love and hungry yearning of the mother for her child, that his condition—stricken by fever, and that of his father lying at the very gates of death—were almost forgotten.

"If only he knows my arms are round him," she thought; "if only I can hear his voice call me *mother*, I will die with him content."

After a few hours, when there were lines of dawn in the eastern sky, Mary felt the barge was being moored to the river bank; and her guide, rising from his seat, came towards her, gave her his hand and said—

"We have now to go on foot for some distance, to the place where your son lies. Are you able for this?"

For Mary was stiff and cramped with her position in the barge for so long a time, and she would have fallen as she stepped out, had not one of the watermen caught her, saying,—

"Steady, Madam! steady!"

After a few tottering steps, Mary recovered herself, and said,—

"The motion of walking will be good for me; let us go forward."

It was a long and weary tramp through spongy, low-lying land, and the way seemed interminable.

At last, just as the sun was sending shafts of light across river and swamp—making them glow like burnished silver, and covering every tall spike of rush and flag with diamonds—a few straggling cottages or huts came in sight.

A clump of pollards hid the cluster of buildings which formed the nucleus of the little hamlet, till they were actually before a low, irregular block of cottages, and at the door of one of these Mary's guide stopped.

"A few of our brethren took refuge here after the taking of Axel and the burning of our habitation there.

We are under the protection of the Duke of Parma, who is advancing with an army for the relief of Zutphen, and will, as we believe, drive from before us the foes of the Holy Church."

As they passed under the low doorway into a narrow entry paved with clay, Mary's guide said,—

"Tarry here, while I find what has passed in my absence."

Mary was not left long in suspense.

The man presently returned, and, beckoning her, said,—

"Come, without delay!"

Mary found herself in a low, miserably furnished room on the ground-floor, where, in the now clear light of the bright summer morning, Ambrose Gifford lay dying.

The "large, cruel, black eyes," as Lucy Forrester had called them long ago, were dim now, and were turned with pitiful pleading upon the wife he had so grievously injured.

The priest stood by, and signed to Mary to kneel and put her face near her husband, that she might hear what he had to say.

As she obeyed, the hood fell back from her head, and a ray of sunshine caught the wealth of her rich chestnut hair and made an aureole round it. The grey streaks, which sorrow rather than years, had mingled amongst the bronze locks, shone like silver. She took the long, wasted hand in hers, and, in a low, clear voice, said,—

"I am here, Ambrose! what would you say to me?"

"The boy!" he gasped; "fetch hither the boy!"

One of the Brothers obeyed the dying man's request, and from a pallet at the farther end of the room he brought the boy, whose cheeks were aflame with fever, as he lay helpless in the Brother's arms.

"Here, Ambrose," the dying father said—"this—this is your mother; be a good son to her."

Often as Mary Gifford had drawn a picture in her own mind of this possible meeting with her son, so long delayed, such a meeting as this had never been imagined in her wildest dreams.

"Thus, then, I make atonement," the unhappy man said. "Take him, Mary, and forgive it *all*."

"Yes," Mary said, as the boy was laid on the pallet at his father's feet, and his mother clasped him close to her side. "Yes, I forgive—"

"*All?*" he said. "*All?*"

"As I pray God to be forgiven," she said, womanly pity for this forlorn ending of a misspent life thrilling in her voice, as hot tears coursed one another down her pale sweet face. "Yes," she repeated, "*all!* Ambrose."

"One thing more. Did I murder Humphrey Ratcliffe? Does that sin lie on my soul?"

"No, thank God!" Mary said. "He lives; he was cruelly wounded, but God spared his life."

There was silence now. The priest bid Mary move from the bed, and let him approach; but, before she did so, she bent over her husband and said,—

"Have you gone to the Saviour of the world for forgiveness through His precious blood, Ambrose? He alone can forgive sins."

"I know it! I know it!" was the reply.

But the priest interfered now.

"Withdraw, my daughter, for the end is near."

Then Mary, bending still lower, pressed a kiss upon the forehead, where the cold dew of death were gathering, and, turning towards her boy, she said,—

"Where shall I take him? Where can I go with him, my son, my son?"

There was something in Mary's self-restraint and in the pathetic tones of her voice, which moved those who stood around to pity as she repeated,—

"Where can I find a refuge with my child? I cannot remain here with him."

One of the Brothers raised Ambrose again in his arms, and saying, "Follow me," he carried him to a small chamber on the upper floor, where he laid him down on a heap of straw covered with an old sacking, and said in English,—

"This is all I can do for you. Yonder room whence we came is kept for those stricken with the fever. Two of them died yesterday. We were burned out of house and home, and our oratory sacked and destroyed at Axel. We fled hither, and a troop of the Duke's army is within a mile to protect us."

"Is there no leech at hand, no one to care for my child?"

"There was one here yester eve. He is attached to the troop I speak of, and has enow to do with the sick there. Famine and moisture have done their work, and God knows where it will end. There is a good woman at a small homestead not a mile away. She has kept us from starving, and, like many of the Hollanders, has a kind heart. I will do my best to get her to befriend you, Mistress, for I see you are in a sorry plight."

"Even water to wet his lips would be a boon. I pray you fetch water," she entreated.

The man disappeared, and presently returned with a rough pitcher of water and a flagon in which, he said, was a little drink prepared from herbs by the kindly Vrouw he had spoken of.

"I will seek her as quickly as other claims permit," he said. And then Mary was left alone with her boy.

The restlessness of fever was followed by a spell of utter exhaustion, but the delirious murmurs ceased, and a light of consciousness came into those large, lustrous eyes, by which Mary knew this was indeed her son.

Otherwise, what a change from the rosy, happy child of seven, full of life and vigour, to the emaciated boy of twelve, whose face was prematurely old, and, unshaded by the once abundant hair, which had been close cropped to his head, looked ghostly and unfamiliar.

Still, he was hers once more, and she took off the ragged black gown, which had been the uniform of the scholars of the Jesuit school, and was now only fit for the fire, and taking off her own cloak, she wrapped him in it, bathed his face with water, put the herb cordial to his lips, and then, setting herself on an old chair, the only furniture in the tumbledown attic, she raised Ambrose on her knees, and, whispering loving words and prayers over him, hungered for a sign of recognition.

Evidently the poor boy's weary brain was awakened by some magnetic power to a consciousness that some lost clue of his happy childhood had been restored to him.

As his head lay against his mother's breast the rest there was apparently sweet.

He sighed as if contented, closed his eyes and slept.

Mary dare not move or scarcely breathe, lest she should disturb the slumber in which, as she gazed upon his face, the features of her lost child seemed to come out with more certain likeness to her Ambrose of past years.

For a smile played round the scarlet lips, and the long, dark fringe of the lashes resting on his cheeks, brought back the many times in the old home when she had seen them shadow the rounded rosy cheeks of his infant days.

A mother's love knows no weariness, and, as the hours passed and Ambrose still slept, Mary forgot her aching back and arms, her forlorn position in that desolate attic, even the painful ordeal she had gone through by her husband's dying bed—forgot everything but the joy that, whether for life or death, her boy was restored to her.

At last Ambrose stirred, and the smile faded from his lips. He raised his head and gazed up into the face bending over him.

"I dreamed," he faltered; "I dreamed I saw my *mother*—my *mother*." He repeated the word with a feeble cry—*my mother*; "but it's only a dream. I have no mother but the blessed Virgin, and she—she is so far, far away, up in Heaven."

"Ambrose, my sweetheart, my son!" Mary said gently. "I am not far away; I am here! Your own mother."

"It's good of you to come down from Heaven,

mother; take me—take me back with you. I am so—so weary—weary; and I can't say all the Latin prayers to you; I can't."

"Ambrose," poor Mary said, "you need say no more Latin prayers; you are with me, your own mother, on earth."

The wave of remembrance grew stronger, and, after a moment's pause, Ambrose said,—

"Ned brought me two speckled eggs. The hawk caught the poor little bird; the cruel hawk. Where am I? *Ave Maria, ora pro nobis.*"

"Say rather, dear child, 'Dear Father in heaven, bless me, and keep me.'"

"Yes, yes; that is the prayer I said by—"

"*Me*—me, your own mother."

The long-deferred hope was at last fulfilled, and Mary Gifford tasted the very fruit of the tree of life, as Ambrose, with full consciousness, gazed long and earnestly at her, and said,—

"Yes, you are my mother, my own mother; not a dream."

"Ah! say it again, my child, my child."

"My own mother," the boy repeated, raising his thin hand and stroking his mother's face, where tears were now running down unchecked, tears of thankfulness; such as, for many a long year, she had never shed.

With such bliss the stranger cannot intermeddle; but mothers who have had a child restored to them from the very borders of the unseen land will know what Mary Gifford felt.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHAT RIGHT?

“Her look and countenance was settled, her face soft, and almost still, of one measure! without any passionate gesture or violent motion, till at length, as it were, awakening and strengthening herself, ‘Well,’ she said, ‘yet this is best; and of this I am sure, that, however they wrong me, they cannot overmaster God. No darkness blinds His eyes, no gaol bars Him out; to whom else should I fly but to Him for succour.’ ”—*The Arcadia*.

THE Countess of Pembroke was sitting in the chamber which overlooked the pleasance at Penshurst and the raised terrace above it, on a quiet autumn day of the year of 1586.

She had come to her early home to arrange the letters and papers which her mother, Lady Mary, had committed to her care on her deathbed.

There were other matters, too, which demanded her attention, and which the Earl was only too glad to help her to settle; he was now in London for that purpose.

There were many difficulties to meet in the division of the property, and Sir Henry had been so terribly hampered by the want of money, that debts sprang up on every side.

Lady Pembroke had great administrative power, and, added to her other gifts, a remarkable clear-headedness and discernment.

The sombre mourning which she wore accentuated her beauty, and set off the lovely pink-and-white of her complexion, and the radiant hair, which was, as she laughingly told her brother, "the badge of the Sidneys."

The profound stillness which brooded over Penshurst suited Lady Pembroke's mood, and, looking out from the casement, she saw Lucy Forrester, playing ball with her boy Will on the terrace. Lucy's light and agile figure was seen to great advantage as she sprang forward or ran backward, to catch the ball from the boy's hands. His laughter rang through the still air as, at last, Lucy missed the catch, and then Lady Pembroke saw him run down the steps leading to the pleasance below to meet George Ratcliffe, who was coming in from the entrance on that side of the park.

Lady Pembroke smiled as she saw George advance with his cap in his hand towards Lucy. His stalwart figure was set off by the short green tunic he wore, and a sheaf of arrows at his side, and a bow strapped across his broad shoulders, showed that he had been shooting in the woods.

Only a few words were exchanged, and then Lucy turned, and, leaving George with little Will Herbert, she came swiftly toward the house, and Lady Pembroke presently heard her quick, light tread in the corridor on which her room opened.

"Madam!" Lucy said, entering breathlessly, "I bear a letter from Humphrey to his brother; it has great news for me. Mary has found her boy, and that evil man, Ambrose Gifford, is dead. Will it please you to

hear the letter. I can scarcely contain my joy that Mary has found her child; he was her idol, and I began to despair that she would ever set eyes on him again."

Lady Pembroke was never too full of her own interests to be unable to enter into those of her ladies and dependants.

"I am right glad, Lucy," she said. "Let me hear what good Humphrey has to say, and, perchance, there will be mention of my brothers in the letter. Read it, Lucy. I am all impatience to hear;" and Lucy read, not without difficulty, the large sheet of parchment, which had been sent, with other documents, from the seat of war by special messenger.

"To my good brother, George Ratcliffe, from before Zutphen,—“This to tell you that I, making an expedition by order of my master, Sir Philip Sidney, to reconnoitre the country before Zutphen, where, please God, we will in a few days meet and vanquish the enemy, fell upon a farm-house, and entering, asked whether the folk there were favourable to the righteous cause we have in hand or the contrary. Methinks there never was a joy greater than mine, when, after some weeks of despair, I found there Mistress Mary Gifford and her son! Three weeks before the day on which I write, Mistress Gifford had disappeared from the town of Arnhem, nor could we find a trace of her. I have before told you how, in the taking of Axel, I got a wound in my back from the hand of a traitor, when I had rescued his son from the burning house, where

a nest of Jesuits were training young boys in their damnable doctrines.

“From the moment I was carried wounded to Arnhem I heard nought of the child, snatched by the villain from my arms, till that evening when, God be praised, I was led to the very place where he has been nursed by his mother in a sore sickness. It has been my good fortune to give her, my ever-beloved mistress, safe convoy to Arnhem, where they are, thank God, safe under the care of that God-fearing man and worthy divine, Master George Gifford.

“Here I left them, returning to Flushing, where a strong force is ready to meet the enemy, ay, and beat them back with slaughter when they advance. The Earl of Leicester is in command, but the life and soul and wisdom of the defence lie with my noble master, Sir Philip. To serve under him is sure one of the greatest honours a man can know. We have his brave brothers also at hand. Robert is scarce a whit less brave than his brother, and of Mr. Thomas, it is enough to say of him he is a Sidney, and worthy of that name.

“I write in haste, for the despatches are made up, thus I can say but little of the hope within my heart, which, God grant, will now at last be not, as for so many long years, a hope in vain.

“Ambrose Gifford died of the fever, and, having made his confession, was absolved by the priest, and forgiven by that saint who has suffered from his sins! This last more for his benefit than the first, methinks! But I can no more.

“Commend me to our mother and Mistress Lucy Forrester. If I fall in the coming fight, I pray you,

George, remember to protect one dearest to me on earth.—I rest your loving brother,

“HUMPHREY RATCLIFFE.

“*Post Scriptum*.—The enemy is advancing, and we shall be ordered out to meet them ere sunset. God defend the right.
H. R.”

“What is the date of that letter, Lucy?” Lady Pembroke asked.

“The twenty-first day of September, Madam.”

“And this is the twenty-sixth. More news will sure be here ere long, and another victory assured, if it please God. May He protect my brothers in the fight. But, Lucy, I rejoice to hear of your sister’s happiness in the recovery of her child; and now, in due course, I trust my brother’s faithful servant and friend, Master Humphrey, will have the reward of his loyalty.”

“Yes, Madam; I hope Mary may, as you say, reward Humphrey.”

“And you, Lucy; sure Master George is worthy that you should grant him his reward also.”

Lucy’s bright face clouded as the Countess said this, and a bright crimson flush rose to her cheeks.

“Dear Madam,” she said, “I shrink from giving a meagre return for such faithful love. Sure ere a woman gives herself to a man till death, she should make certain that he is the one in all the world for her.”

“I will not contradict this, Lucy; but many women misjudge their own hearts, and—”

Lady Pembroke hesitated. Then, after a pause, she said,—

"There are some women who make their own idol, and worship it. After all, it is an unreality to them, because unattainable."

"Nay, Madam," Lucy said, with kindling eyes. "I crave pardon; but the unattainable may yet be a reality. Because the sun is set on high in the heavens, it is yet our own when warmed by its beams and brightened by its shining. True, many share in this, but yet it is—we cannot help it—ours by possession when we feel its influence. Methinks," the girl said, her face shining with a strange light—"methinks I would sooner worship—ay, and love—the unattainable, if pure, noble and good, than have part and lot with the attainable that did not fulfil my dream of all that a true knight and noble gentleman should be."

Lady Pembroke drew Lucy towards her, and, looking into her face, said,—

"May God direct you aright, dear child! You have done me and mine good service, and the day, when it comes, that I lose you will be no day of rejoicing for me. When first you entered my household I looked on you as a gay and thoughtless maiden, and felt somewhat fearful how you would bear yourself in the midst of temptations, which, strive as we may, must beset those who form the household of a nobleman like the Earl, my husband. He makes wise choice, as far as may be, of the gentlemen attached to his service; but there is ever some black sheep in a large flock, and discretion is needed by the gentlewomen who come into daily intercourse with them. You have shown that discretion, Lucy, and it makes me happy to think that

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you have learned much that will be of use to you in the life which lies before you."

"Dear Madam," Lucy said, "I owe you everything—more than tongue can tell; and as long as you are fain to keep me near you, I am proud to stay."

"I feel a strange calm and peace to-day," Lady Pembroke said, as she leaned out of the casement and looked down on the scene familiar to her from childhood. "It is the peace of the autumn," she said; "and I am able to think of my father—my noble father and dear mother at rest in Paradise—gathered in like sheaves of ripe corn into the garner—meeting Ambrosia and the other younger children, whom they surrendered to God with tears, but not without hope. I am full of confidence that Philip will win fresh laurels, and I only grieve that the parents, who would have rejoiced at his success, will never know how nobly he has borne himself in this war. There will be news soon, and good Sir Francis Walsingham is sure to send it hither post haste. Till it comes, let us be patient."

It was the afternoon of the following day that Lucy Forrester crossed the Medway by the stepping-stones, and went up the hill to Ford Manor.

It was her custom to do so whenever Lady Pembroke was at Penshurst. Her stepmother was greatly softened by time, and subdued by the yoke which her Puritan husband, who was now lord and master of the house and all in it, had laid upon her.

As Lucy turned into the lane, she met Ned coming along with a calf, which he was leading by a strong rope, to the slaughter-house in the village.

Ned's honest face kindled with smiles as he exclaimed,—

“Well-a-day, Mistress Lucy, you are more like an angel than ever. Did I ever see the like?”

“Have you heard the good news, Ned?” Lucy asked. “Mistress Gifford has her boy safe and sound at Arnhem.”

Ned opened eyes and mouth with astonishment which deprived him of the power of speech.

“Yes,” Lucy continued, “and she is a free woman now, Ned, for her husband is dead.”

“And right good news that is, anyhow,” Ned gasped out at last. “Dead; then there's one rogue the less in the world. But to think of the boy. What is he like, I wonder? He was a young torment sometimes, and I've had many a chase after him when he was meddling with the chicks. The old hen nearly scratched his eyes out one day when he tapped the end of an egg to see if he could get the chick out. Lord, he was a jackanapes, surely; but we all made much of him.”

“He has been very sick with fever,” Lucy said, “and, I dare say, marvellously changed in four years. You are changed, Ned,” Lucy said; “you are grown a big man.”

“Ay,” Ned said, tugging at the mouth of the calf, which showed a strong inclination to kick out, and butt with his pretty head against Ned's ribs. “Ay; and I *am* a man, Mistress Lucy. I have courted Avice; and—well—we were asked in church last Sunday.”

“I am right glad to hear it, Ned; and I wish you happiness. I must go forward now to the house.”

"I say!—hold! Mistress Lucy!" Ned said, with shamefaced earnestness. "Don't think me too free and bold—but are you never going to wed? You are a bit cruel to one I could name."

This was said with such fervour, mingled with fear lest Lucy should be offended, that she could not help smiling as she turned away, saying,—

"The poor calf will kick itself wild if you stay here much longer. So, good-day to you, good Ned; and I will send Avice a wedding gift. I have a pretty blue kerchief that will suit her of which I have no need; for we are all in sombre mourning garments for the great and good lord and lady of Penshurst."

Lucy found her stepmother seated in the old place on the settle, but not alone. "Her master," as she called him with great truth, was with her, and two of "the chosen ones," who were drinking mead and munching cakes from a pile on the board.

He invited Lucy to partake of the fare, but she declined, and, having told her stepmother the news about Mary, she did not feel much disposed to remain.

"The boy found, do you say?" snarled her stepmother's husband. "It would have been a cause of thankfulness if that young limb of the Evil One had never been found. You may tell your sister, Mistress Lucy, that neither her boy nor herself will ever darken these doors. We want no Papists here."

"Nay, nay, no Papists," echoed one of the brethren, with his mouth full of cake.

"Nay, nay," chimed in another, as he set down the huge cup of mead after a prolonged pull. "No Papists here to bring a curse upon the house."

Lucy could not help feeling pity for her step-mother, who sat knitting on the settle—her once voluble tongue silenced, her mien dejected and forlorn. Lucy bent down and kissed her, saying in a low voice,—

“You are glad, I know, Mary has found her child.”

And the answer came almost in a whisper, with a scared glance in the direction of her husband and his guests,—

“Ay, ay, sure *I am glad.*”

Lucy lingered on the rough ground before the house, and looked down upon the scene before her, trying in vain to realise that this had ever been her home.

The wood-crowned heights to the left were showing the tints of autumn, and a soft haze lay in the valley, and brooded over the home of the Sidneys, the stately walls of the castle and the tower of the church clearly seen through the branches of the encircling trees, which the storm of a few days before had thinned of many of their leaves.

The mist seemed to thicken every minute, and as Lucy turned into the road she gave up a dim idea she had of going on to Hillside to pay her respects to Madam Ratcliffe, and hastened toward the village. The mist soon became a fog, which crept up the hill-side, and, before she had crossed the plank over the river, it had blotted out everything but near objects. There seemed a weight over everything, animate and inanimate. The cows in the meadow to the right of the bridge stood with bent heads and depressed tails. They looked unnaturally large, seen through the thick atmosphere; and the melancholy caw of some belated

rooks above Lucy's head, as they winged their homeward way, deepened the depression which she felt creeping over her, as the fog had crept over the country side. The village children had been called in by their mothers, and there was not the usual sound of boys and girls at play in the street. The rumble of a cart in the distance sounded like the mutter and mumble of a discontented spirit; and as Lucy passed through the square formed by the old timbered houses by the lych gate, no one was about.

The silence and gloom were oppressive and Lucy's cloak was saturated with moisture. She entered the house by the large hall, and here, too, was silence. But in the President's Court beyond, Lucy heard voices, low and subdued. She listened, with the foreshadowing of evil tidings upon her, and yet she stood rooted to the spot, unwilling to turn fears into certainty, suspense into the reality of some calamity.

Presently a gentleman, who had evidently ridden hard, came into the hall, his cloak and buskins bespattered with mud. He bowed to Lucy, and said,—

"I am a messenger sent post haste from Mr. Secretary Walsingham, with despatches for the Countess of Pembroke. I have sent for one Mistress Crawley, who, I am informed, is the head of the Countess's ladies. My news is from the Netherlands."

"Ill news?" Lucy asked.

"Sir Philip Sidney is sorely wounded in the fight before Zutphen, I grieve to say."

"Wounded!" Lucy repeated the word. "*Sore wounded!*" Then, in a voice so low that it could scarcely be heard, she added, "Dead! is he dead?"

"Nay, Madam; and we may hope for better tidings. For—"

He was interrupted here by the entrance of Mistress Crawley.

"Ill news!" she exclaimed. "And who is there amongst us who dare be the bearer of it to my lady? Not I, not I! Her heart will break if Sir Philip is wounded and like to die."

Several young maidens of Lady Pembroke's household had followed Mistress Crawley into the hall, regardless of the reproof they knew they should receive for venturing to do so.

"I cannot tell my lady—nay, I dare not!" Mistress Crawley said, wringing her hands in despair.

"Here is the despatch which Sir Francis Walsingham has committed to me," the gentleman said. "I crave pardon, but I must e'en take yonder seat. I have ridden hard, and I am well-nigh exhausted," he continued, as he threw himself on one of the benches, and called for a cup of sack.

Lucy meanwhile stood motionless as a statue, her wet cloak clinging to her slender figure, the hood falling back from her head, the long, damp tresses of hair rippling over her shoulders.

"I will take the despatch to my lady," she said, in a calm voice, "if so be I may be trusted to do so."

"Yes, yes!" Mistress Crawley said. "Go—go, child, and I will follow with burnt feathers and cordial when I think the news is told," and Mistress Crawley hurried away, the maidens scattering at her presence like a flock of pigeons.

Lucy took the despatch from the hand of the exhausted messenger, and went to perform her task.

Lady Pembroke was reading to her boy Will some passages from the *Arcadia*, which, in leisure moments, she was condensing and revising, as a pleasant recreation after the work of sorting the family letters and papers, and deciding which to destroy and which to keep.

When Lucy tapped at the door, Will ran to open it.

Even the child was struck by the white face which he saw before him, and he exclaimed,—

“Mistress Lucy is sick, mother.”

“No,” Lucy said, “dear Madam,” as Lady Pembroke turned, and, seeing her, rose hastily. “No, Madam, I am not sick, but I bring you a despatch from Sir Francis Walsingham. It is ill news, dearest lady, but not news which leaves no room for hope.”

“It is news of Philip—Philip!” Lady Pembroke said, trying with trembling fingers to break the seal and detach the silk cord which fastened the letter. “Take it, Lucy, and—and tell me the contents. I cannot see. I cannot open it!”

Then, while the boy nestled close to his mother, as if to give her strength by putting his arms round her, Lucy obeyed her instructions, and opening it, read the Earl of Leicester’s private letter, which had accompanied the official despatch, giving an account of the investment of Zutphen and the battle which had been fought before its walls. This private letter was enclosed for Lady Pembroke in that to his Right Honourable and trusted friend Sir F. Walsingham.

"In the mist of the morning of the 23d, my incomparable brave nephew and your brother, Philip Sidney, with but five hundred foot and seven hundred horsemen, advanced to the very walls of Zutphen.

"It was hard fighting against a thousand of the enemy. Philip's horse was killed under him, and alas! he heightened the danger by his fearless courage; for he had thrown off his cuisses to be no better equipped than Sir William Pelham, who had no time to put on his own, and, springing on a fresh horse, he went hotly to the second charge. Again there was a third onset, and our incomparable Philip was shot in the left leg.

"They brought him near me, faint from loss of blood, and he called for water. They brought him a bottle full, and he was about to raise it to his parched lips, when he espied a poor dying soldier cast greedy, ghastly eyes thereon. He forbore to drink of the water, and, handing the bottle to the poor wretch, said,—

"'Take it—thy need is greater than mine.'"

"Oh! Philip! Philip!" Lady Pembroke said, "in death, as in life, self-forgetting and Christ-like in your deeds."

Lucy raised her eyes from the letter and they met those of her mistress with perfect sympathy which had no need of words.

"Doth my uncle say more, Lucy? Read on."

"And," Lucy continued, in the same low voice, which had in it a ring of mingled pride in her ideal hero and sorrow for his pain, "my nephew would not

take on himself any glory or honour when Sir William Russel, also sorely wounded, exclaimed,—

“‘Oh, noble Sir Philip, never did man attain hurt so honourably or so valiantly as you,’ weeping over him as if he had been his mistress.

“‘I have done no more,’ he said, “than God and England claimed of me. My life could not be better spent than in this day’s service.” I ordered my barge to be prepared, and, the surgeons doing all they could to stanch the blood, Philip was conveyed to Arnhem. He rests now in the house of one Madam Gruithuissens, and all that love and care can do, dear niece, shall be done by his and your sorrowing uncle,

LEICESTER.

“Pardon this penmanship. It is writ in haste, and not without tears, for verily, I seem now to know, as never before, what the world and his kindred possess in Philip Sidney.”

R. L.

“To my dear niece, Mary, Countess of Pembroke, from before Zutphen, on the twenty-second day of September, in the year of grace 1586. Enclosed in despatch to the Right Honourable Sir Francis Walsingham.”

When Lucy had finished reading, the Countess took the letter, and rising, left the room, bidding Will to remain behind.

Mistress Crawley, who was waiting in the corridor to be called in with cordials and burnt feathers, was amazed to see her lady pass out with a faint, sad smile putting aside the offered cordial.

“Nay, good Crawley, my hurt lies beyond the cure

of aught but that of Him who has stricken me. I would fain be alone."

"Dear heart!" Mistress Crawley exclaimed, as she bustled into the room where Lucy still sat motionless, while Will, with child-like intolerance of suspense, ran off to seek someone who would speak, and not sit dumb and white like Lucy. "Dear heart! I daresay it is not a death-wound. Sure, if there is a God in heaven, He will spare the life of a noble knight like Sir Philip. He will live," Mistress Crawley said, taking a sudden turn from despair and fear to unreasonable hope. "He will live, and we shall see him riding into the Court ere long, brave and hearty, so don't pine like that, Mistress Lucy; and I don't, for my part, know what right you have to take on like this; have a sup of cordial, and let us go about our business."

But Lucy turned away her head, and still sat with folded hands where Lady Pembroke had left her.

Mistress Crawley finished by emptying the silver cup full of cordial herself, and, pressing her hand to her heart, said,—“She felt like to swoon at first, but it would do no good to sit moping, and Lucy had best bestir herself, and, for her part, she did not know why she should sit there as if she were moon-struck.”

The days were long over since Mistress Crawley had ordered Lucy, in the same commanding tones with which she often struck terror into the hearts of the other maidens, threatening them with dismissal and report of their ill-conduct to Lady Pembroke.

Lucy had won the place she held by her gentleness and submission, and, let it be said, by her quickness and readiness to perform the duties required of her.

So Mistress Crawley, finding her adjurations unheeded, bustled off to see that the maidens were not gossiping in the ante-chamber, but had returned to their work.

Lucy was thus left alone with her thoughts, and, in silence and solitude, she faced the full weight of this sorrow which had fallen on the house of Sidney, yes, and on her also.

"What right had she to sit and mourn? What part was hers in this great trouble?" Mistress Crawley's words were repeated again and again in a low whisper, as if communing with her own heart.

"What right have I? No right if right goes by possession. What right? Nay, none."

Then, with a sudden awaking from the trance of sorrow, Lucy rose, the light came back to her eyes, the colour to her cheeks.

"Right? What right? Yes, the right that is mine, that for long, long years he has been as the sun in my sky. I have gloried in all his great gifts, I have said a thousand times that there were none like him, none. I have seen him as he is, and his goodness and truth have inspirited me in my weakness and ignorance to reach after what is pure and noble. Yes, I have a right, and oh! if, indeed, I never see him again, to my latest day I shall thank God I have known him, Philip, Sir Philip Sidney, true and noble knight."

There was now a sound of more arrivals in the hall, and Lucy was leaving the room, fearing, hoping,

that there might be yet further tidings, when the Earl of Pembroke came hastily along the corridor.

"How fares it with my lady, Mistress Forrester? I have come to give her what poor comfort lies in my power."

The Earl's face betrayed deep emotion and anxiety.

Will came running after his father, delighted to see him; and in this delight forgetting what had brought him.

"Father! father! I have ridden old black Joan, and I can take a low fence, father."

"Hush now, my son, thy mother is in sore trouble, as we all must be. Take me to thy mother, boy."

"Uncle Philip will soon be well of his wound," the child said, "the bullet did not touch his heart, Master Ratcliffe saith."

The Earl shook his head.

"It will be as God pleases, boy," and there, in the corridor, as he was hastening to his wife's apartments, she came towards him with outstretched arms.

"Oh! my husband," she said, as he clasped her to his breast. "Oh! pity me, pity me! and pray God that I may find comfort."

"Yes, yes, my sweetheart," the Earl said, and then husband and wife turned into their own chamber, Will, subdued at the sight of his mother's grief, not attempting to follow them, and Lucy was again alone.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PASSING OF PHILIP.

“Oh, Death, that hast us of much riches reft,
 Tell us at least what hast thou with it done?
 What has become of him whose flower here left
 Is but the shadow of his likeness gone?
 Scarce like the shadow of that which he was,
 Nought like, but that he like a shade did pass.

But that immortal spirit which was decked
 With all the dowries of celestial grace,
 By sovereign choice from heavenly choirs select
 And lineally derived from angel's race;
 Oh, what is now of it become aread?
 Ah, me, can so divine a thing be dead!

Ah no, it is not dead, nor can it die,
 But lives for aye in blissful Paradise,
 Where, like a new-born babe it soft doth lie
 In bed of lilies wrapped in tender wise,
 And dainty violets from head to feet,
 And compassed all about with roses sweet.”

From the *Lament of Sir Philip* by

MARY, COUNTESS OF PEMBROKE.

“AT Arnhem, in the month of October 1586; this to my dear sister, Lucy Forrester.” This was the endorsement of a letter from Mary Gifford, which was put into Lucy's hands on the day when a wave of sorrow swept over the country as the news was

passed from mouth to mouth that Sir Philip Sidney was dead.

There had been so many alternations of hope and fear, and the official reports from the Earl of Leicester had been on the hopeful side, while those of Robert Sidney and other of his devoted friends and servants, had latterly been on the side of despair.

Now Mary Gifford had written for Lucy's information an account of what had passed in these five-and-twenty days, when Sir Philip lay in the house of Madame Gruithuissens, ministered to by her uncle, Master George Gifford.

The letter was begun on the seventeenth of October, and finished a few days later, and was as follows:—

“After the last news that I have sent you, dear sister, it will not be a surprise to you to learn that our watching is at an end. The brave heart ceased to beat at two of the clock on this seventeenth of October in the afternoon.

“It has been a wondrous scene for those who have been near at hand to see and hear all that has passed in the upper chamber of Madame Gruithuissens' house.

I account it a privilege of which I am undeserving, that I was suffered, in ever so small a way, to do aught for his comfort by rendering help to Madame Gruithuissens in the making of messes to tempt the sick man to eat, and also by doing what lay in my power to console those who have been beside themselves with grief—his two brothers.

“What love they bore him! And how earnestly they desire to follow in his steps I cannot say.

“Mr. Robert was knighted after the battle which has cost England so dear, and my uncle saith that when he went first to his brother’s side with his honour fresh upon him, Sir Philip smiled brightly, and said playfully,—

“‘Good Sir Robert, we must see to it that we treat you with due respect now,’ and then, turning to Mr. Thomas, he said, ‘Nor shall your bravery be forgot, Thomas, as soon as I am at Court again. I will e’en commend my youngest brother to the Queen’s Highness. So we will have three knights to bear our father’s name.’

“At this time Sir Philip believed he should live, and, indeed, so did most of those who from day to day watching his courage and never-failing patience; the surgeon saying those were so greatly in his favour to further his recovery. But from that morning when he himself discerned the signs of approaching death, he made himself ready for that great change. Nay, Lucy, methinks this readiness had been long before assured.

“My uncle returned again and again from the dying bed to weep, as he recounted to me and my boy the holy and beautiful words Sir Philip spake.

“Of himself, only humbly; of all he did and wrote, as nothing in God’s sight. His prayers were such that my uncle has never heard the like, for they seemed to call down the presence of God in the very midst of them.

“He was troubled somewhat lest his mind should fail him through grievous wrack of pain of body, but that trouble was set at rest.

"To the very end his bright intelligence shone, even more and more, till, as we now believe, it is shining in the perfectness of the Kingdom of God.

"On Sunday evening last, he seemed to revive marvellously, and called for paper and pencil. Then, with a smile, he handed a note to his brother, Sir Robert, and bade him despatch it to Master John Wier, a famous physician at the Court of the Duke of Cleves.

"This note was wrote in Latin, and begged Master Wier to *come*, and *come* quick. But soon after he grew weaker, and my good uncle asking how he fared, he replied sorrowfully that he could not sleep, though he had besought God to grant him this boon. But when my uncle reminded him of One who, in unspeakable anguish, prayed, as it would seem to our poor blind eyes, in vain, for the bitter cup did not pass, said,—

"‘Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt!’ he exclaimed.

"‘I am fully satisfied and resolved with this answer. No doubt it is even so.’

There were moments yet of sadness, and he reproached himself for cherishing vain hopes in sending for Master Wier, but my uncle comforted him so much that at length he pronounced these memorable words, ‘I would not change my joy for the empire of the world.’

"I saw him from time to time as I brought to the chamber necessary things. Once or twice he waved his hand to me, and said, oh, words ne’er to be forgot,—

"‘I rejoice you have your boy safe once more,

Mistress Gifford. Be wary, and train him in the faith of God, and pray that he be kept from the trammels with which Papacy would enthrall the soul.'

"He showed great tenderness and care for Lady Frances, dreading lest she should be harmed by her constant attendance on him.

"Sweet and gentle lady! I have had the privilege of waiting on her from time to time, and of giving her what poor comfort lay in my power.

"After the settlement of his worldly affairs, Sir Philip asked to have the last ode he wrote chanted to him, but begged that all the stray leaves of the *Arcadia* should be gathered together and burned. He said that it was but vanity and the story of earthly loves, and he did not care to have it outlive him.

"My uncle was with him when he begged Sir Robert to leave him, for his grief could not be controlled. While the sufferer showed strength in suppressing sorrow, the strong man showed weakness in expressing it.

"Much more will be made known of these twenty-five days following the wound which caused our loss.

"For myself, I write these scanty and imperfect details for my own comfort, in knowing that they will be, in a sad sort, a comfort to you, dear sister, and, I might humbly hope, to your lady also.

"My uncle, praying by Sir Philip's side, after he had addressed his farewell to his brother, seeing him lie back on the pillow as if unconscious, said, 'Sir, if you hear what I say, let us by some means know if you have inward joy and consolation of God.'

"Immediately his hand, which had been thought

powerless, was raised, and a clear token given to those who stood by that his understanding had not failed him.

“Once more, when asked the same question, he raised his hands with joined palms and fingers pointing upwards as in prayer—and so departed.

“I wrote so far, and now I have been with my boy watching the removal of all that is mortal of this great and noble one from Arnhem to Flushing, convoyed to the water’s edge by twelve hundred English soldiers, trailing their swords and muskets in the dust, while solemn music played.

“The surgeons have embalmed the poor, worn body, and the Earl of Leicester has commanded that it be taken to England for burial.

“‘Mother,’ my boy said, as he clasped my hand tightly in his, as the barge which bore the coffin away vanished in the mist hanging over the river, ‘mother, why doth God take hence a brave and noble knight, and leave so many who are evil and do evil instead of good?’

“How can I answer questions like to this? I could only say to my son, ‘There is no answer. Now we only see as in a mirror darkly; at length we shall see clearer in the Light of God, and His ways are ever just.’

“Dear sister, it is strange to have the hunger of my heart satisfied by God’s gift to me of my boy from the very gates of death, and yet to have that same heart oppressed with sorrow for those who are left to mourn for the brave and noble one who is passed out

of our sight. Yet is that same heart full of thankfulness that I have recovered my child. It is not all satisfaction with him. Every day I have to pray that much that he has learned in the Jesuit school should be unlearned. Yet, God forbid I should be slow to acknowledge that in some things Ambrose has been trained well—in obedience, and the putting aside of self, and the mortification of appetite. Yes, I feel that in this discipline he may have reaped a benefit which with me he might have missed. But, oh! Lucy, there are moments when I long with heart-sick longing for my joyous, if wilful child, who, on a fair spring evening long ago, sat astride on Sir Philip's horse, and had for his one wish to be such another brave and noble gentleman!

"Methinks this wish is gaining strength, and that the strange repression of all natural feeling which I sometimes notice, may vanish 'neath the brighter shining of love—God's love and his mother's.

"You would scarce believe, could you see Ambrose, that he—so tall and thin, with quiet and restrained movements and seldom smiling mouth—could be the little torment of Ford Place! Four years have told on my boy, like thrice that number, and belike the terrible ravages of the fever may have taken something of his youthful spring away.

"He is tender and gentle to me, but there is reserve.

"On one subject we can exchange but few words; you will know what that subject is. From the little I can gather, I think his father was not unkind to him; and far be it from me to forget the parting words, when the soul was standing ready to take its flight into

the unseen world. But oh! my sister, how wide the gulf set between him, for whom the whole world, I may say, wears mourning garb to-day—for foreign countries mourn no less than England—how wide, I say, is the gulf set between that noble life and his, of whom I dare not write, scarce dare to think.

“Yet God’s mercy is infinite in Christ Jesus, and the gulf, which looks so wide to us, may be bridged over by that same infinite mercy.

“God grant it.

“This with my humble, dutiful sympathy to your dear lady, the Countess of Pembroke, for whom no poor words of man can be of comfort, from your loving sister,
MARY GIFFORD.

“*Post Scriptum.*—Master Humphrey Ratcliffe has proved a true friend to me, and to my boy. To him, under God, I owe my child’s restoration to health, and to me.

“He is away with that solemn and sorrowful train I saw embark for Flushing, nor do I know when he will return.
M. G.”

“At Penshurst, in the month of February 1586,—For you, my dear sister Mary, I will write some account of the sorrowful pageant, from witnessing which I have lately returned to Penshurst with my dear and sorely-stricken mistress, and all words would fail me to tell you how heavy is her grief, and how nobly she has borne herself under its weight.

“Four long and weary months have these been since the news of Sir Philip’s death came to cast a

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dark shadow over this country. Much there has been to harass those who are intimately connected with him. Of these troubles I need not write. The swift following of Sir Philip's death on that of his honoured father, Sir Henry Sidney, caused mighty difficulties as to the carrying out of that last will and testament in which he so nobly desired to have every creditor satisfied, and justice done.

"But, sure, no man had ever a more generous and worthy father-in-law than Sir Philip possessed in Sir Francis Walsingham. All honour be to him for the zeal and care he has shown in the settlement of what seemed at the first insurmountable mountains of difficulties.

"Of these it does not become me to speak, rather of that day, Thursday last past, when I was witness of the great ceremony of burying all that was mortal of him for whom Queen and peasant weep.

"Mary! you can scarce picture to yourself the sight which I looked on from a casement by the side of my dear mistress. All the long train of mourners taken from every class, the uplifted standard with the Cross of St. George, the esquires and gentlemen in their long cloaks of mourning garb, these were a wondrous spectacle. In the long train was Sir Philip's war horse, led by a footman and ridden by a little page bearing a broken lance, followed by another horse, like the first, richly caparisoned, ridden by a boy holding a battle-axe reversed. All this I say I gazed at as a show, and my mistress, like myself, was tearless. I could not believe, nay, I could not think of our hero as connected with this pageant. Nay, nor with that coffin, shrouded

in black velvet, carried by seven yeomen, and the pall borne by those gentlemen who loved him best, his dearest friends, Sir Fulke Greville, Sir Edward Dyer, Edward Watson, and Thomas Dudley.

"Next came the two brothers, Sir Robert—now Lord of Penshurst—chief mourner, and behind, poor Mr. Thomas Sidney, who was so bowed down with grief that he could scarce support himself.

"Earls and nobles, headed by my Lord of Leicester, came after; and the gentlemen from the Low Countries, of whom you will have heard, and all the great city folk—Lord Mayor and Sheriffs—bringing up the rear.

"My dear mistress and I, with many other ladies of her household, having watched the long train pass us from the Minories, were conveyed by back ways to St. Paul's, and, from a seat appointed us and other wives of nobles and their gentlewomen, we were present at the last scene.

"It was when the coffin, beautifully adorned with escutcheons, was placed on a bier prepared for it, that my mistress said, in a low voice, heard by me—perhaps by me only,—

"*'Beati mortui qui in Domino moriuntur.'*

"These words were the motto on the coffin, and they were the words on which the preacher tried to enforce his lesson.

"Up to the moment when the double volley was fired, telling us within the church that the body rested in peace, there had been profound stillness.

"Then the murmur of a multitude sorrowing and sighing, broke upon the ear; and yet, beyond those whispered words, my lady had not made any sign.

"Now she laid her hand in mine and said,—

"‘Let us go and see where they have laid him.’

"I gave notice to the gentlemen in attendance that this was my lady's desire. We had to wait yet for a long space; the throng, so closely packed, must needs disperse.

"At length way was made for us, and we stood by the open grave together—my mistress, whose life had been bound up in her noble brother's, and I, to whom he had been, from my childhood's days to the present, the hero to whose excellence none could approach—a sun before whose shining other lights grew dim.

"Do not judge me hardly! Nay, Mary, you of all others will not do this. My love for him was sacred, and I looked for no return; but let none grudge it to me, for it drew me ever upwards, and, as I humbly pray, will still do so till I see him in the other life, whither he has gone.

"Throughout all this pageantry and symbols of woe which I have tried to bring before you, my dear sister, I felt only that these signs of the great grief of the whole realm were yet but vain, vain, vain.

"As in a vision, I was fain to see beyond the blackness of funeral pomp, the exceeding beauty of his soul, who, when he lay a-dying, said he had fixed his thoughts on these eternal beauties, which cheered his decaying spirits, and helped him to take possession of the immortal inheritance given to him by, and in Christ.

"‘Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, blessed be those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.’

"I have finished the task I set myself to do for your edification, dearest sister. Methought I could scarce get through it for tears, but these did not flow at my will. Not till this morning, when I betook myself to the park, where all around are signs of a springing new life, and memories of Sir Philip in every part, did these tears I speak of have their free way. All things wakening into life, buds swelling on the stately trees he loved; birds singing, for the time to pair is come; dew sparkling like the lustre of precious stones on every twig and blade of grass, daisies with golden eyes peeping up between. Life, life, everywhere quickening life, and he who loved life, and to see good days, can walk no more in the old dear paths of his home, which he trod with so graceful and alert a step, his smile like the sunshine lying on the gate of the President's Court, under which he that went out on the November morning in all the glory of his young manhood, shall pass in no more for ever.

"As I thought of seeing him thus, with the light on his bright hair and glistening armour, as he took his infant child in his arms and bade her farewell, I wept, not bitter tears, but those God sends to us as a blessing when the heart desires some ease of its burden.

"It may be that you will care to read what I have written to the boy Ambrose. Bid him from me to remember his old desire to be such another brave and goodly knight as Sir Philip Sidney, and strive to follow him in all loyal service to his God, his Queen, and his kindred.

"I am thinking often, Mary, of your return to this

country. Will it never come to pass? You told me in your letter in which you gave me those particulars of Sir Philip's death, that I should scarce believe that Ambrose was the child I knew at the old home of Ford Place. And scarce will you believe, when we meet, as meet I pray we shall, I am the same Lucy of days past. Ever since that time of your grief and sickness, I have changed. I look back with something which is akin to pity on the vain child who thought fine clothes and array the likeliest to enhance the fair face and form which maybe God has given me. Ay, Mary, I have learned better now. I should have been a dullard, in sooth, had I not learned much in the companionship graciously granted me by my honoured mistress. To be near her is an education, and she has been pleased in many ways to instruct me, not only in the needlecraft and tapestry work in which she excels, but also in opening for me the gates of knowledge, and in rehearsing in my ear the beautiful words of Scripture, and the Psalms in verse, as well as the poems of Mr. Spenser, and, chiefest of all, of those works in prose and verse which Sir Philip has left behind. Sure, these will never die, and will tell those who come after us what we possessed and lost!

“Yet, after all, as my mistress saith again and yet again, it was not by all his deeds of valour and his gifts of learning that he stands so high forever amongst men. No, nor not by his death and the selfless act which men are speaking of on all sides, as he lay in the first agony of his sore wound on the battlefield of Zutphen. Not by these only will his name live, but by his life, which, for purity and faith, virtue and godliness, loyalty

and truth, may be said to be without peer in this age of which he was so fair an ornament.

"I dare not say more, lest even you charge me with rhapsody.

"I rest, dear Mary, in all loving and tender affection,
your sister, LUCY FORRESTER.

"To my honoured sister, Mary Gifford, at the house of Master Gifford, in Arnhem, February 1586. From Penshurst Place, in the county of Kent."

CHAPTER XVI.

FOUR YEARS LATER—1590.

“My true love hath my heart and I have his,
By just exchange, one for the other given.
I hold his dear, and mine he cannot miss;
There never was a better bargain driven.

His heart in me keeps me and him in one,
My heart in him his thoughts and senses guides;
He loves my heart, for once it was his own,
I cherish his, because in me it bides.”

THE sound of these words by Sir Philip Sidney, sung in a sweet melodious voice, was borne upon the summer air of a fair June evening in the year 1590.

It came through the open casement from the raised seat of the parlour at Hillbrow, where once Mistress Ratcliffe had sat at her spinning-wheel, casting her watchful eyes from time to time upon the square of turf lying between the house and the entrance gate, lest any of her maidens should be gossiping instead of working.

Mistress Ratcliffe had spun her last thread of flax more than a year ago, and another mistress reigned in her place in the old house upon the crest of the hill above Penshurst.

As the last words of the song were sung, and only the lingering chords of the viol were heard, making a

low, sweet refrain, a man who had been listening unseen to the music under the porch, with its heavy overhanging shield of carved stone, now came to the open window, which, though raised some feet above the terrace walk beneath, was not so high but that his head appeared on a level with the wide ledge of the casement.

Lucy was unconscious of his presence till he said,—
“I would fain hear that song again, Lucy.”

“Nay,” she said with a smile; “once is enough.”

“Did you think of me as you sang?” he asked.

“Perhaps,” she said, with something of her old spirit. “Perhaps; but you must know there is another who hath my heart. I have been singing him to sleep, and I pray you do not come in with a heavy tramp of your big boots and wake him. He has been fractious to-day. Speak softly,” she said, as George exclaimed,—

“The young rascal! I warrant you have near broken your back carrying him to and fro.”

“My back is not so easy to break; but, George, when will the travellers come. I have made all things ready these two days and more.”

“They may arrive any moment now,” George said, and then his bright handsome face disappeared from the window, and in another moment he had come as quietly as was possible for him, into the sunny parlour, now beautified by silken drapery, worked by Lucy’s clever fingers, and sweet with the fragrance of flowers in the beau-pot on the hearth and fresh rushes on the floor.

In a large wooden cradle lay his first-born son—named in memory of one whom neither husband nor

wife could ever forget—Philip. The child was small and delicate, and Lucy had tasted not only the sweets of motherhood, but its cares.

Yet little Philip was very fair to look upon. He had the refined features of his mother, and though his cheeks wanted something of the roundness and rosiness of healthful infancy, he was, in his parents' eyes, as near perfection as first-born children are ever apt to be thought!

George paused by the cradle, which was raised on high rockers, and, bending over it, said,—

“He is sound asleep now,” just touching the little hand lying outside the coverlet with his great fingers as gently as his mother could have done.

“I won't be jealous of him, eh, Lucy? He is mine as well as yours, sweetheart.”

“That is a truism,” Lucy said. “Now, come into the window-seat and talk low—if you must talk—and let us watch for those who are, I pray God, drawing near.”

George unfastened his leather pouch which was slung over his shoulder, and put the bow and quiver against the corner of the bay window.

Then he threw his huge form at his wife's feet on the dais, and said,—

“Do not be too eager for their coming, sweetheart. I half dread their entrance into this house, which, perchance may disturb our bliss.”

“Fie for shame!” Lucy replied, “as if Mary could ever be aught but a joy and a blessing. I am ready to blush for you, George.”

“They will be grand folk, grander than we are, that

is, than *I* am! Humphrey knighted, and Mary Dame Ratcliffe. Then there is the boy! I am not sure as to the boy. I confess I fear the early training of the Jesuits may have left a mark on him."

"Now, I will listen to no more growlings, George," his wife said, laying her small fair hand on the thick masses of her husband's hair, and smoothing it from his forehead. "You will please to give the coming guests a hearty welcome, and be proud to call them brother, sister, and nephew."

"Nay," George said. "Ambrose is no nephew of mine!"

"To think of such folly, when, but a minute ago, you said what is mine is yours. Ambrose is *my* nephew, I'd have you to remember, sir."

"As you will, sweet wife! as you will; but, Lucy, when you see Humphrey ride up with a train of gentlemen, it may be, and my lady with her gentlewomen, will you not be sorry that you left everything to be the wife of a country yeoman, who is unversed in fine doings, and can give you so little?"

"You give me all I want," Lucy said; and this time, as she smoothed back the rebellious curls, she bent and kissed the broad brow which they shaded. "You give me all I want," she repeated—"your heart!"

Soon there was a sound of horses' feet, and, with an exclamation, "Here at last!" George went to the gate to receive the guests, and Lucy hurried to the porch.

"The noise and bustle may rouse little Philip," she said to one of her maids; "watch in the parlour till I return."

In another moment Humphrey had grasped his

brother's hand, and, turning, lifted his wife from the pillion on which she had ridden with her son.

"Mary! Mary!" and Lucy ran swiftly to meet her sister, and held her in a long embrace.

A meeting after years of separation is always mingled with joy something akin to pain, and it was not till the first excitement of this reunion was over that the joy predominated.

Mary was greatly changed; her hair was white; and on her sweet face there were many lines of suffering. Lucy led her into the parlour, and she could only sink down upon the settle by her side, and hold her hand in hers, looking with wistful earnestness into her face.

"So fair still! and happy, dearest child!" Mary whispered in a low voice. "Happy! and content?"

"*Yes*," Lucy replied proudly. "And *you*, Mary, you are happy now?"

"Blest with the tender care of my husband. *Yes*; but, Lucy, I bring him but a poor reward for all his patient love."

"Nay, he does not think so, I'll warrant," Lucy said. "You will soon be well and hearty in your native air, and the colour will come back to your cheeks and the brightness to your eyes."

"To rival yours, dear child! Nay, you forget how time, as well as sickness and sorrow, have left its mark on me."

"And Ambrose?" Lucy asked. "You have comfort in him?"

"Yes," Mary said. "Yes, but, dear heart, the vanished days of childhood return not. Ambrose is old for his sixteen years; and, although dear, dear as

ever, I am prone to look back on those days at Ford Manor, when he was mine, all mine, before the severance from me changed him."

"Sure he is not a Papist now?" Lucy said. "I trust not."

"Nay, he is not professedly a Papist, but the teaching of those four years sowed seed. Yet he loves me, and is a dutiful son to me, and to his—his new father. I ought to be satisfied."

Little Philip now turned in his cradle, awoke by the entrance of the two brothers and Ambrose, who had been to the stables to see that the grooms and horses were well cared for.

Lucy raised Philip in her arms, and Mary said,—

"Ah! give him to me, sweet boy. See, Ambrose, here is your cousin; nay, I might say your brother, for it is a double tie between you."

The tall stripling looked down on the little morsel of humanity with a puzzled expression.

"He is very small, methinks," he said.

This roused Lucy's maternal vanity.

"Small, forsooth! Do you expect a babe of eight months to be a giant. He is big enow for my taste and his father's. Too big at times, I vow, for he is a weight to carry."

Ambrose felt he had made a mistake, and hastened to add,—

"He has wondrous large eyes;" and then he bent over his mother and said, "You should be resting in your own chamber, mother."

"Yes; well spoken, my boy," Humphrey said. "Mary is not as hearty as I could desire," he added,

turning to George. "Maybe Lucy will take her to her chamber, and forgive her if she does not come to sup in the hall."

Lucy gave little Philip to his father, who held him in awkward fashion, till the nurse came to the rescue and soothed his faint wailing by the usual nonsense words of endearment which then, as now, nurses seem to consider the proper language in which to address babies.

When the two brothers were alone together that night, Humphrey said,—

"It is all prosperous and well with you now, George. You have got your heart's desire, and your fair lady looks fairer, ay, and happier than I ever saw her."

"Ay, Humphrey, it is true. At times I wonder at my own good fortune. I had my fears that she would hanker after fine things and grand folk, but it is not so. She went with the boy to Wilton two months ago to visit the Countess of Pembroke, who holds her in a wonderful affection. The boy is her godson, and she has made him many fine gifts. I was fearful Lucy would find this home dull after a taste of her old life; but, Heaven bless her, when I lifted her from the horse with the child on her return, she kissed me and said, 'I am right glad to get home again.' I hope, Humphrey, all is well and prosperous with you also?"

"I may say yes as regards prosperity, beyond what I deserve. I have a place about the Court, under my Lord Essex, and I was knighted, as you know, for what they were pleased to call bravery in the Armada fight. After we lost that wise and noble gentleman, Sir Philip

Sidney, everything went crooked under the Earl of Leicester, and Spain thought she was going to triumph and crush England with the Armada. But God defended the right, and the victory is ours. Spain is humbled now. Would to God Sir Philip Sidney had lived to see it and share the glory."

George listened as his brother spoke, with flashing eyes, of the final discomfiture of Spain, and then noticed how his whole manner changed to softness and sadness, as he went on to say,—

"My heart's desire in the possession of the one woman whom I ever loved is granted, but, George, I hold her by a slender thread. I have brought her here with the hope that she may gather strength, but, as you must see, she is but the shadow of her old self. The good old man at Arnhem counselled me to take her to her native air, and God grant it may revive her. She is saint-like in her patience and in her love for me. Heaven knows I am not worthy of her, yet let me bless God I have her to cherish, and, by all means that in me lies, fan the flame of her precious life, trusting to see it burn brightly once more. But, George, I fear more than I hope. What will all honours and Court favour be to me if I lose her?"

"You will keep her," George said, in the assured tone that those who are happy often use when speaking to others who are less happy than themselves. "You will keep her, Humphrey, she shall have milk warm from one of my best cows, and feed on the fat of the land. Oh! we will soon see the Dame Mary Ratcliffe fit to go to Court and shine there."

Humphrey shook his head.

“That is the last thing Mary would desire.” Then changing his tone, he went on: “What think you of Ambrose, George?”

“He is big enow, and handsome. Is he amenable and easy to control.”

“I have no cause to find fault with him; he lacks spirit somewhat, and has taken a craze to be scholar rather than a soldier. He has been studying at Göttingen, and now desires to enter Cambridge. The old ambition to be a soldier and brave knight, like Sir Philip Sidney, died out during those years spent in the Jesuit school, and he is accounted marvellously clever at Latin and Greek.”

“Humph,” George said. “Let us hope there is no lurking Jesuitry in him. The worse for him if there is, for the Queen is employing every means to run the poor wretches to earth. The prisons are chock full of them, and the mass held in abhorrence.”

“Ambrose was but a child when with the Jesuits—scarce twelve years old when I came upon him, and recovered him for his mother. No, no, I do not fear Papacy for him, though, I confess, I would rather see him a rollicking young soldier than the quiet, reserved fellow he is. One thing is certain, he has a devotion for his mother, and for that I bless the boy. He considers her first in everything, and she can enter into his learning with a zest and interest which I cannot.”

“Learning is not everything,” George said, “let me hope so, at any rate, as I am no scholar.”

“No; but it is a great deal when added to godliness,” Humphrey replied. “We saw that in the wonderful life of Sir Philip Sidney. It was hard to say in

what he excelled most, learning or statesmanship or soldiering. Ay, there will never be one to match him in our time, nor in any future time, so I am ready to think. There's scarce a day passes but he comes before me, George, and scarce a day but I marvel why that brilliant sun went down while it was high noonday. Thirty-one years and all was told."

"Yes," George said; "but though he is dead he is not forgotten, and that's more than can be said of thousands who have died since he died—four years ago; by Queen and humble folk he is remembered."

George Ratcliffe's prophecy seemed likely to be fulfilled. Mary Gifford gained strength daily, and very soon she was able to walk in the pleasance by Hillside Manor, which George had laid out for Lucy, in those long waiting days when he gathered together all that he thought would please in the "lady's chamber" he had made ready for her, long before his dream of seeing her in it was realised.

Gradually Mary was able to extend her walks, and it was on one evening in July that she told Lucy she should like to walk down to Ford Manor.

Lucy remonstrated, and said she feared if she allowed her to go so far Humphrey and Ambrose, who had gone away to London for a few days, would be displeased with her for allowing it.

"I would fain go there with you and see Ned and old Jenkins. The newcomers have kept on their services, I hope?"

"Yes, all things are the same, except that the poor old stepmother and her ill-conditioned husband have left it, and are living in Tunbridge. He preaches and

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prays, and spends her savings, and, let us hope, he is content. The dear old place was going to wrack and ruin, so Sir Robert's orders came that they were to quit."

"Poor old place! To think," Lucy said, "that I could ever feel an affection for it, but it is so nevertheless."

So, in the golden light of sunset, the two sisters stood by the old thorn tree on the bit of ground in front of Ford Manor once more.

Ned and Jenkyns had bidden them welcome, and, by the permission of the present owners of the farm, they had gone through the house, now much improved by needful repairs and better furnishing. But, whatever changes there were in the house and its inhabitants, the smiling landscape stretched out before the two sisters as they stood by the crooked back of the old thorn tree was the same. The woodlands, in the glory of the summer prime, clothed the uplands; the tower of the church, the stately walls of the Castle of Penshurst, the home of the noble race of Sidney, stood out amidst the wealth of foliage of encircling trees as in years gone by. The meadows were sloping down to the village, where the red roofs of the cottages clustered, and the spiral columns of thin blue smoke showed where busy housewives were preparing the evening meal at the wood fire kindled on the open hearth. The rooks were flying homewards with their monotonous caw. From a copse, just below Ford Manor, the ring-doves were repeating the old, old song of love. As Mary Gifford stood with her face turned towards the full light of the evening sky, she looked again to Lucy like the Mary of

old. Neither spoke; their hearts were too full for words, but they clasped each other's hands in a silence more eloquent than speech.

Both sisters' thoughts were full of the past rather than the present.

Mary seemed to see before her the little fair-haired boy who had been so eager to mount Sir Philip's horse, and Sir Philip, with his radiant smile and gracious kindness, so ready to gratify the boy's desire as he set him on the saddle.

And Mary heard, too, again the ringing voice as little Ambrose said,—

"I would fain be a noble gentleman and brave soldier like Mr. Philip Sidney. I would like to ride with him far, far away."

She recalled now the pang those words had caused her, and how she dreaded the parting which came all too soon, and had been so bitter to her. Now, she had her son restored to her, but she felt, as how many mothers have felt since, a strange hunger of the soul, for her vanished child! Ambrose, quiet and sedate, and eager to be an accomplished scholar, tall, almost dignified, for his sixteen years, was indeed her son, and she could thank God for him. Yet she thought with a strange regret, of the days when he threw his arms round her in a rough embrace, or trotted chattering by her side as she went about the farm, or, still sweeter memory, murmured in his sleep her name, and looked up at her with a half-awakened smile, as he found her near, and felt her kisses on his forehead.

From these thoughts Mary was roused by Ambrose himself,—

“Mother,” he said, “this is too far for you to walk. You should not have ventured down the hill. We have returned to find the house empty; and my father is in some distress when he heard you had come so far.”

Ambrose spoke as if he were constituted his mother’s caretaker; and Lucy, laughing, said,—

“You need not look so mighty grave about it, Ambrose; your mother is not tired. Forsooth, one would think you were an old man giving counsel, rather than a boy.”

Ambrose disliked of all things to be called a boy; and, since his first remark about the baby Philip, there had often been a little war of words between aunt and nephew.

“Boys may have more wits than grown folk sometime,” he replied. “Here comes my father, who does not think me such a fool as, perchance, you do, Aunt Lucy. He has brought a horse to carry my mother up the steep hill.”

“Well, I will leave her to your double care,” Lucy said. “I see George follows a-foot. We will go up the hill path, and be at home before you, I’ll warrant. She ran gaily away to meet George; and as Mary was lifted on the pillion by Humphrey, Ambrose taking his place by his mother, he turned in the opposite direction, and, following Lucy and her husband, was soon out of sight.

Mother and son rode slowly along the familiar path which leads into the high road from Penshurst.

The glow of sunset was around them, and the crimson cloth mantle Mary wore shone in the westering light. So they pass out of sight, and the shadows

gather over the landscape, and evening closes in. As a dream when one awaketh is the history of the past, and the individual lives which stand out in it are like phantoms which we strive, perhaps in vain, to quicken into life once more, and clothe them with the vivid colours for which imagination may lend its aid. Of the central figure of this story of the spacious times of great Elizabeth, we may say—with the sister who loved him with no common love—

“Ah, no! his spirit is not dead—nor can it die,
But lives for aye in blissful Paradise,
Where, like a new-born babe, it soft doth lie,
In bed of lilies—wrapped in tender wise,
And compassed all about with roses sweet,
And dainty violets from head to feet.”

THE END.

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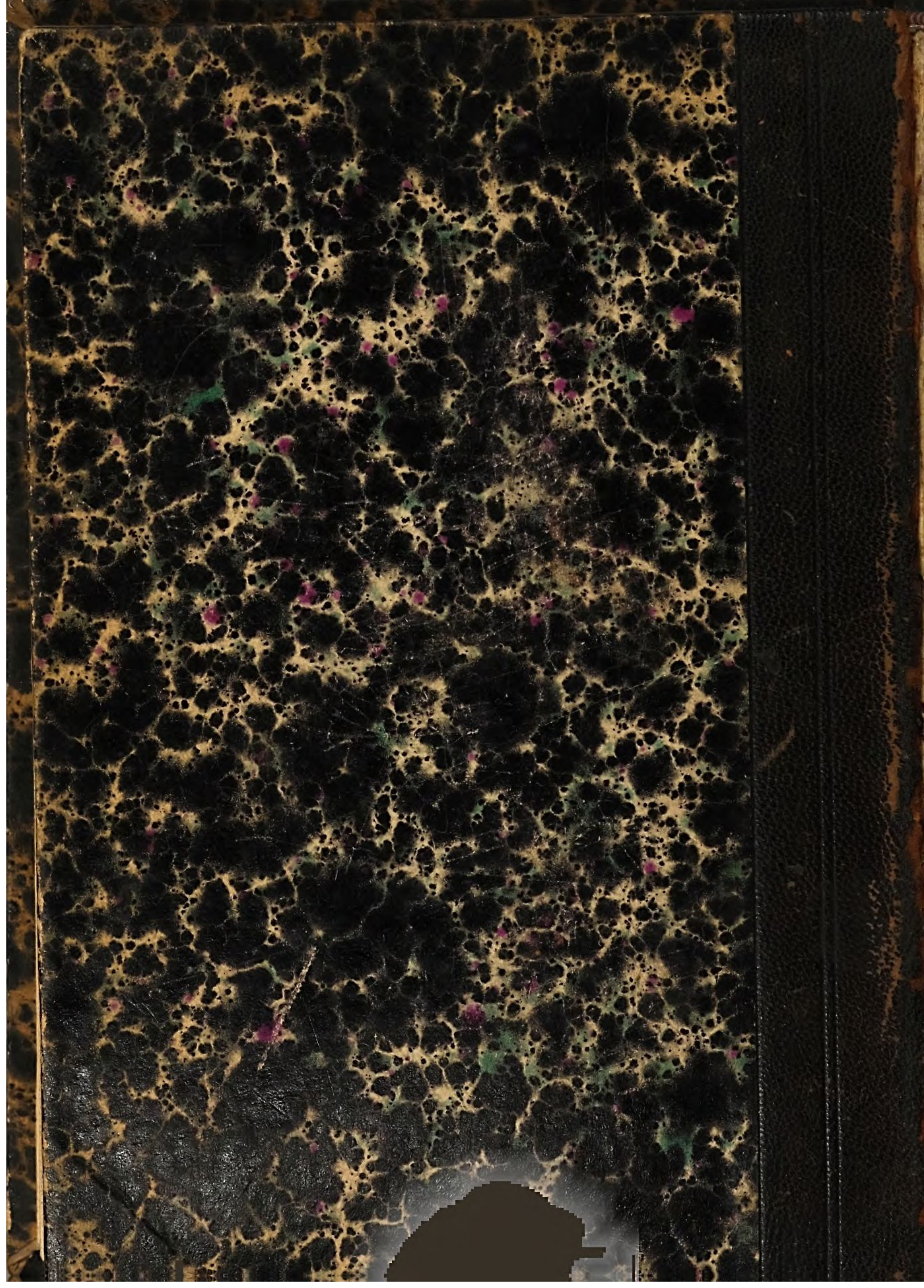
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